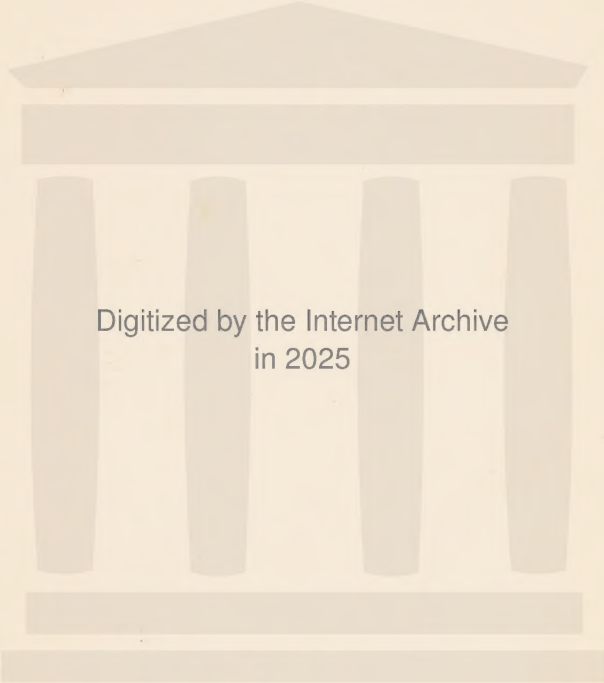






Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2025

COURT ROYAL

VOL. II.

COURT ROYAL

A STORY OF CROSS CURRENTS

BY THE

AUTHOR OF 'MEHALAH' 'JOHN HERRING' &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. II.

LONDON

SMITH, ELDER, & CO., 15 WATERLOO PLACE

1886

[All rights reserved]

CONTENTS

OF

THE SECOND VOLUME.



CHAPTER	PAGE
XX. DULCINA	1
XXI. HOME-THRUSTS	10
XXII. A FAMILY COUNCIL	22
XXIII. REFLORESCENCE	36
XXIV. CAUGHT NAPPING	53
XXV. WITHOUT WARNING	75
XXVI. UNSTABLE AS WATER	89
XXVII. REVOLT	102
XXVIII. A PLAYBILL	119
XXIX. TWO STAGE BOXES	131
XXX. PALMA	150
XXXI. A SPOKE IN THE WHEEL	163
XXXII. A DROP OF COMFORT	177
XXXIII. BROKEN OFF	194
XXXIV. INCURABLES	204
XXXV. A CARD CASTLE	221
XXXVI. THE COUNCIL OF COURT ROYAL	239
XXXVII. A SISTER OF MERCY	252
XXXVIII. REFORMATION	266
XXXIX. OVER A SNAIL	282

COURT ROYAL.

A STORY OF CROSS CURRENTS.



CHAPTER XX.

DULCINA.

IN the afternoon Lord and Lady Edward Eveleigh called on the Rigsbys. The Archdeaconess was full of civility. She was a pleasant, fine-looking woman, with grey hair, and very clear eyes. She spoke in a decided manner. She had ruled her house, her husband—almost the Archdeaconry—for many years. She had ruled society—at least clerical society—for a wide radius. This had given decision to her character and a determination to be obeyed which few were strong enough to stand against.

Miss Rigsby was seated on a sofa. She had expected the visit, and was prepared for it. She wore a crude blue shawl thrown over her

shoulders, and a mauve handkerchief was tied round her aching jaws. She had bracelets on both arms, and her fingers were encrusted with rings. She was a pale, freckled young lady, not ugly, and not pretty, with very light eyebrows, and hair thick and coarse. She was proud of her red hair, and had it frizzed into a mass. Her grey eyes were dull, but the pain she had endured had perhaps quenched their light.

‘I am going to carry you off to the Rectory,’ said Lady Elizabeth. ‘It is of no use your protesting. What I have made up my mind to I carry out, as the diocese well knows. I restored Sleepy Hollow church myself. I said to the Archdeacon, “It must be done,” and as he would not put his shoulder to the wheel, I begged, got up a bazaar, and did it. I am going to make much of you. You want the quiet and comfort of an English home. We’ll soon set you on your feet again, and screw up the relaxed nerves. I know exactly what you want.’

Mr. Rigsby looked entreatingly at his daughter. He had made up his mind to spend a fortnight at Sleepy Hollow, but he did not dare to accept the invitation without the consent of his spoiled child.

Dulcina answered, in a condescending tone, 'I am afraid we shall be in your way.'

'Not at all, or I would not have asked you.'

Mr. Rigsby brightened. His daughter was yielding.

'The invitation is kind,' said Dulcina, 'and if I did not fear trespassing on your goodness I should like to accept.'

'Then accept,' said Lady Elizabeth. 'There—the matter is concluded. I gave orders for the rooms to be got ready before I left the Rectory.'

'You are perhaps expecting visitors?'

'Only Lord Saltcombe—he could be stowed anywhere if we were hard put to, but we are not. Our predecessor at Sleepy Hollow had fourteen children, and added to the Rectory to accommodate them. We have no family, and so there are any number of spare rooms.'

'I am not in a visiting condition,' protested Miss Rigsby; 'my nerves are shaken; I have suffered a great deal.'

'We will put you to rights,' said Lady Elizabeth; 'I understand all that is needed. I doctor the parish—I may almost say I feed it; my opinion is that most maladies proceed from over-feeding or underfeeding. With the poor it is

over and underfeeding simultaneously; they overfeed themselves with heavy, lumpy pastry without much nutriment in it, that weighs like lead in them, and they underfeed themselves by not taking good blood and tissue-making diet. You understand me?’

‘I think so,’ answered Miss Rigsby listlessly. The poor interested her little or nothing—she occupied her own entire horizon. ‘But I,’ she said, ‘eat neither what is lumpy, nor what is insufficient.’

‘My dear,’ said the Archdeaconess, ‘here in an inn you cannot have the requisite comforts. There is no house in the world like an English house for a person who is sick or convalescent. So it is settled that you come.’

‘I really am not up to meeting strangers and making conversation,’ said Dulcina.

‘Strangers! Oh, Saltcombe! He is my nephew; a nice young man, very agreeable. He will talk, and I can always talk. Besides, Miss Rigsby, if you are going to buy Shotley and settle among us, we must introduce you to the neighbours, when you are well.’

‘I do not think papa has settled about Shotley yet.’

‘I’ll go over the place with him. I will

manage everything. I know the quality of the soil on which it is built, the nature of the drainage, and the water supply. I can tell you all the advantages and disadvantages of the place, and I should wish to have a word about the price. I do not choose to have you taken in and pay a fancy price. There is not a glut of country-houses in the market. Leave it to me.'

'Lady Elizabeth is a most knowing and business-like person, you will find,' said the Archdeacon. 'Dear young lady, be persuaded, and spend at least a fortnight with us.'

'Besides,' said the Venerable the Archdeaconess, 'I should like to have Vigurs under my eye. You have no conception what a stimulus it gives to activity and genius when I overlook the workmen. Vigurs, the dentist, has a great respect for me. He would take infinite pains over you if he knew I was watching him. Vigurs is a good man—still, the best need supervision.'

'There's something in that,' said Mr. Rigsby.

'Then, again,' said Lady Elizabeth, 'I am bent on getting my niece, Lady Grace Eveleigh, to us after Christmas, and I am eager that you, Miss Rigsby, should know her, and see, if that could possibly be contrived, the Duke's beautiful

place, Court Royal, which I assure you is one of the finest residences in the West of England. The Duke would be so interested to hear from your father all about Indian affairs; his Grace is particularly interested in India, and, of course, also Ceylon. It would be a treat to him to talk them over with your father, and you—you will be enraptured with the beauty and comfort of Court Royal. Leave this to me: I am a manager. I will get Lady Grace to visit us, and she will invite you there. You are sure to get on well together.'

Lady Elizabeth played to her husband's bat, but the Rigsbys did not see her play. Father and daughter were flattered. The invitation was accepted.

As the Archdeacon and his wife drove home in their brougham, Lord Edward said to his better half—

'What do you think of her? She is not ugly.'

'Not pronouncedly ugly, certainly. She is simply uninteresting. I do not think that Saltcombe will care for her.'

'He *must* take her,' said the Archdeacon agitated, putting his hand on that of his wife, and it shook. 'If he does not, the whole house

of Kingsbridge will collapse. My dear Elizabeth, the crash is imminent. I cannot see how it can be averted except by Saltcombe's marriage.'

'But he is so inert. He will not realise the state of affairs.'

'That is true. But I take on myself to make him realise it, and that excellent young fellow, Beavis Worthivale, who regards him as a brother, will help me.'

Lady Elizabeth shook her head. 'The time is past when men sacrificed themselves for their families. I do not believe that Saltcombe cares sufficiently for his position, and the family dignity, to saddle himself with a wretched, selfish, inane, pasty-faced East Indian, so that he may redeem the family from ruin and give his position a new lease of splendour.'

'I will write to him directly I get home,' said Lord Edward. 'I have sent a premonitory telegram. He is not so dead to duty as to reject a solemn appeal from me.'

So the Archdeacon, on his return, took up his pen and wrote his nephew the following letter :

'MY DEAR SALTCOMBE,—I particularly want you to come here at once. Pack your portman-

teau and start as soon as you possibly can after the receipt of this letter. There are reasons which make me desire your presence here. My dear fellow, you must allow an old man like me to give you a word of advice. You are supposed to know that the property of your dear father, which will one day be yours, is so involved as to be almost past recovery. I say almost, not altogether. It depends on you whether a grand family of historic renown shall sink and disappear. I have no family, your uncle Ronald lost his wife and children. You are unmarried. If you die a bachelor the ducal title goes, the family becomes extinct. You are bound to continue a race which has been illustrious and honourable. I cannot bear to think of dear Court Royal passing into other hands. Now, if you marry, you must marry so as to recover the property from its embarrassments. Such an opportunity presents itself. I will speak to you more fully on this when we meet. I pray you, as an old man, your uncle—one who has your welfare, and that of dear Grace, at heart—do not shrug your shoulders and write to say you cannot come. Come at once. Rouse yourself to the emergencies of the case. Rouse yourself to your duty. An Eveleigh has never hitherto

wanted goading to perform a duty ; never—when required—to commit an act of self-sacrifice.

‘ Till we meet—which will be to-morrow,

‘ Yours most affectionately,

‘ EDWARD EVELEIGH.

‘ P.S.—Elizabeth sends her tenderest love to dear Grace. Kiss her sweet face for me.’

CHAPTER XXI.

HOME-THRUSTS.

THE Marquess of Saltcombe sat in his pretty room of gold and peacock blue and green, in an easy-chair, holding a book in his hand, without reading it. On the table was a zither. Every now and then he put the book down and struck a few chords on the instrument, but he could not play a melody through. The zither demands much practice, and Lord Saltcombe could not or would not devote time to mastering the instrument.

At his side was a desk, open. He put his hand into one of the drawers, from which issued a scent of rose-leaves, and drew forth a red miniature case. He touched the spring with a sigh, and exposed a portrait on ivory. The portrait represented a young and beautiful woman, with large lustrous dark eyes, full of dreamy idealism. The ivory lent the face a

pearly whiteness, and gave brilliance to the coral of the lips. The painter had succeeded in giving to the countenance an expression of tender yearning, tinged with melancholy; it was one of those exquisitely expressive faces which is sometimes given by nature to angels, but sometimes also, in irony, to beings with little of heaven in their souls. The picture, as a work of art, was a masterpiece; the original, unless greatly idealised, must have been irresistible. The face combined in it the simplicity of the child and the earnest of an eager mind, the charm of perfect beauty and the promise of a gifted soul, liveliness and pathos blent together.

Lord Saltcombe looked long at the lovely picture, and his brow clouded. Then he closed the morocco case, laid it on his knee in his hand, and looked dreamily before him into space. The past rose before him, full of pleasure and of pain. Presently he sighed, put his hand to his brow, made a motion of again opening the case, refrained from doing so, and replaced it in the drawer of his desk, which he closed and locked.

He was removing the key from the lock when Beavis came in.

Lord Saltcombe was sufficiently man of the world to have control over his features. Every

trace of his late sadness departed, and his face cleared to meet Beavis' eye. No one would have supposed that, a moment earlier, he had been a prey to the most mournful recollections.

‘Well, Beavis,’ he exclaimed; ‘what has brought you here?’

‘Have you seen the paper?’

‘No—there can be nothing in it to interest me.’

‘Our member is dead.’

‘What, Woodley! My father will feel this. Does he know it?’

‘I think so. He reads his daily paper. Besides, the telegraph boy was up here last night, and no doubt——’

‘O no, that was with a message for me from Uncle Edward. He wants me immediately at Sleepy Hollow.’

‘Are you going?’

‘I don't know; I may. I have nothing to detain me here.’

‘Saltcombe, will you not go into Parliament? Now that Woodley is dead, we must have a new election.’

The Marquess made a gesture of impatience.

‘There will be no opposition.’

‘I do not see why I should go into the

House. I have no opinions. I have not made up my mind on any question that now agitates the political world, and I do not want the trouble of thinking and studying these questions.

‘This is unworthy of you.’

‘You shall be our new member.’

‘No, I have no ambition that way. You are the proper person to represent our pocket borough of Kingsbridge. Of course you have principles. You have inherited those of the family. You are Conservative.’

‘I will open my breast to you, dear Beavis. I know that my father’s and uncles’ opinions are all right, but then I have no doubt that the opinions of the other side are all equally right. My father’s views are exaggerated, and the Radicals are exaggerated in their views, and with Aristotle I hold that in equilibrium is safety.’

‘Both cannot be right,’ said young Worthivale.

‘Yes, they can be, and they are. There are two sides to every question, and he who only sees and becomes hot and vehement on one side is a bigot, narrow-minded and purblind. I am sure that in politics, and in religion, and in ethics—in everything, in fact—

much is to be said on each side, quite as much on one side as on the other ; so I make up my mind to have no fixed opinions on anything. I shrug my shoulders, and let the world go on and muddle its way from one blunder into another. There now, Beavis, you have my creed. How can I go into Parliament with such doctrine in my heart ? ’

‘ That is not a creed at all ; it is the confession of a mind that is too lazy to think. ’

‘ You are very rude. ’

‘ I speak the truth, Saltcombe. You know it. ’

Lord Saltcombe laughed. ‘ Of course you are right, Beavis. It is not pleasant, however, to hear the truth put so plainly. Nevertheless, I maintain that my position is a right one. No man can be a partisan in any cause unless he is ignorant of what is to be said on the opposite side. To be an enthusiast you must be narrow. The man of culture is an all-round man ; he sees good everywhere, is tolerant of every form of faith, religious and political, because he believes that no party holds a monopoly of the right. The man of culture, then, must be indifferent to all parties. ’

‘ With your abilities, and your position, it is wicked to waste your life over shooting partridges

and pheasants, collecting china, and reading ephemeral literature.'

'Upon my word, Beavis, you are sharp on me.'

'I am plain-spoken, Saltcombe, because you must be roused. You are throwing away life in that most miserable of all follies—killing time.'

Lord Saltcombe was annoyed. He raised his eyebrows, and lit a cigar.

'You are striving to deaden the impulses of your nobler nature, which would force you into active life.'

'Indeed,' said the Marquess coldly, 'I do not contradict you. You feel strongly, speak over-vehemently, because you know only one side.'

'I know what is right, what your own conscience tells you is right; and I say it at the risk of forfeiting your friendship.'

'You strain the relation between us, Beavis,' said Lord Saltcombe.

Young Worthivale was silent a moment. Lord Saltcombe crossed his legs and leaned back in his chair. He did not look at Beavis, whom he allowed to stand. He was annoyed, and wanted the young man to go. Presently, as Beavis did not move, he said: 'Life is either

a blank or a torture chamber. If we act in it, we involve ourselves in annoyances ; if we aim at anything, we bring on ourselves disappointment ; if we take a part in politics, we are covered with obloquy by our opponents—that is, by the press of the opposite party ; if we appear in society we are subjected to the insulting inquisitorial eyes of the Society papers ; if we attempt anything in literature, we are cut to pieces by critics who know nothing of the subject to which we have devoted our lives. No, Beavis, a man with self-respect should shut himself up in a walled garden and never leave it, but die there of ennui.’

‘And the enthusiasm of youth is given us only to drive us to disenchantment and disbelief.’

‘That is all.’

‘You look on life, really, from this point of view?’

‘Yes, ever since my disenchantment. Let me alone, Beavis. It may be pleasure to you to anatomise me, but I have no desire to be the subject of your vivisection.’

‘It is no pleasure to me to vivisect you,’ answered Beavis Worthivale. ‘I speak strongly because I feel strongly. Here is Kingsbridge vacant, and you are the right person to repre-

sent it. I speak out what everyone thinks. The Duke, I am sure, wishes it.'

'I have told you, I am no politician.'

'But, surely, you could master the subjects of debate as well as another. Where there is a will there is a way.'

'Exactly—but I have not the *will*.'

Beavis sighed.

'You are not the only man who has been at me to-day. Look at my Uncle Edward's letter, if you like; it lies on the table.'

Beavis took it up, and read it with growing interest. When he came to the end a slight agitation overcame him.

'What is it?' asked the Marquess, who had been watching him. The young man coloured.

'Oh, Saltcombe,' he said, 'the chance has come at last. You must not delay. Why are you now here smoking and reading a book? Have you told Robert to pack your portmanteau? You must catch the next train.'

'I do not like to be brought up to Glastonbury to have my uncle and aunt show me an heiress, and say, "There, look at her coat, how glossy; her hoofs are sound, so is her wind, and she is worth her weight in money." She knows she is on show. I know I am there to criticise.

The situation is detestable. We both look absurd, and the natural result is, we dislike each other, and fly in opposite directions. Besides, I do not want to marry.

‘You must accept Lord Edward’s invitation. He would not write so pressingly unless he had found the right person for you.’

‘But I should prefer to find the right person myself.’

‘Where? In the walled garden in which, as you say, a man of self-respect immures himself. No woman with self-respect will come over the wall to you ; you must go about to see women.’

‘I do not want to see any, much less to have one hang herself round my neck. The more she is weighted with gold the more burdensome she will be to me. Besides, here I have the society of the best and sweetest women that ever bloomed outside Paradise, Grace and Lucy ! they have spoiled me for others.’

‘You cannot decline Lord Edward’s invitation. It is too urgent to be neglected, couched in too tender a tone to be denied. You must go.’

‘I shall return as I go. I want rest ; to be left alone.’

‘You cannot be left alone. Go out of the

world if you want rest. You are building yourself, like a child, a sand castle against the advancing tide; the waves will sweep your walls away and overwhelm you. You desire the impossible. As your uncle says, you have duties to perform, and you will not be the coward to shirk them. You may have to sacrifice much that is dear to you, but every man is made better by self-sacrifice. You are not happy as you are, wasting your days in reading books that do not interest you, following sports that do not amuse you, and collecting cups and saucers that are valueless to you. The books weary you because they are books, and your proper study is life. Your sports fail to distract you because you pursue such poor and wretched game, and the cups and saucers——’ Beavis did not finish his sentence; his brow was red, he was excited, angry—his face expressed contempt.

Lord Saltcombe did not interrupt him. Beavis went on: ‘My father and I devote our lives to your affairs, which are desperate; but we are met at every turn by your inactivity. We cannot save you because you will not put out a finger by which you can be caught. For the sake of your father, your uncles, your sister,

throw aside this paralysing indifference and bestir yourself. You must marry, and marry an heiress, such as your uncle has found for you because you would not put your head outside your walled garden to find one for yourself. You—you must save the family. You alone can do it. Your father—all—look to you, and you take no step *proprio motu*, but have to be driven on with sharp, perhaps cruel, reproaches. Your father does not know the desperate state of your affairs. You ought to know, but will not face it, though the books have been shown you. Your uncles know it, but you repel them when they offer you advice. Lady Grace suspects it, but is too gentle to speak what may give pain. There is absolutely no hope of salvation anywhere else, except in your marriage. If I urged you into political life, it was in the expectation of your being thrown in the way of choosing for yourself. If you stood alone, I would say, sacrifice the estate, sell Court Royal, and begin life on straitened means, working hard, and working your way upward. Seek a regeneration of your family by work. Work makes happy. But you are not alone, Saltcombe, and love for your family forces you to make some sacrifice to maintain it in its proper

position. You have no choice. Be a man, brace your heart, and face the necessity.'

Lord Saltcombe became deadly pale. He stood up and looked at Beavis, who spoke with flushed brow and sparkling eye. After a moment's silence he held out his hand and caught that of Beavis.

'My dear fellow,' he said, pressing his hand, and speaking in a choking voice, 'I honour and love you more than ever. I know what it has cost you to speak to me thus. I feel your reproaches. I will not make a promise to—to——' he looked down. 'Beavis, ring the bell for Robert. He shall pack my traps at once, and to-night I shall be at Sleepy Hollow. There, give me Uncle Edward's letter. I will go see my father at once.'

CHAPTER XXII.

A FAMILY COUNCIL.

MR. WORTHIVALE had summoned Lucy from the Court. Beavis was there. A consultation was to be held on family affairs. The fire was lighted in the drawing-room, and father and son were there awaiting the arrival of Lucy.

‘Father,’ said Beavis, ‘I do not like that new maid you have got.’

‘Why not? She is very respectable and respectful.’

‘She puzzles me. There is a shrewd look about her face that one does not generally meet with in a slavey.’

‘And you dislike her because she is not an unthinking machine?’

‘No, father, that is not it. I expressed myself too strongly when I said that I did not like her; I should rather have said that I mis-trusted her.’

‘Why mistrust her?’

‘Because I am continually lighting upon her in the office.’

‘What of that? Is not that the most used room in the house? Because it is so much used, and so many people come in there to see one, it requires more sweeping than any other part of the establishment. Besides, I make a litter there with my papers. No other maid has arranged the papers so well before. Joanna puts everything where I can lay my hand on it at once.’

‘You leave books and papers about, without locking them up, more than I think wise.’

‘My dear Beavis, who is there to read them? Do you suppose a chambermaid cares one farthing for the accounts, and is greedy to know the clauses of a lease? Besides, Joanna cannot read. Here comes Lucy.’

‘I suppose she has heard the news,’ said Beavis.

‘I don’t know. Lady Grace would be told it last of all.’

Lucy entered. She did not look herself that morning. Generally bright and smiling, with a brilliant colour in her cheeks, she was on this occasion dispirited and somewhat pale.

‘Why, Lucy, what is the matter?’ asked her father.

‘I have had a headache,’ she answered. ‘But I am better now. I could not sleep last night.’ She brightened with an effort, came to her father and kissed him tenderly.

‘How are all at the Court?’ asked Mr. Worthivale. (Here be it noted that he asked this question, however often he met his daughter during the day, before he approached affairs of private interest. The health and welfare of *the* family stood before everything.)

‘The Duke is not so well this morning,’ answered Lucy. ‘He has heard news which has excited him, and excitement always upsets his heart.’

‘The news is of a joyful nature,’ said the steward.

‘Yes, I suppose so,’ answered Lucy faintly, and her eyes fell involuntarily before the observant look of her brother.

‘Stay a bit,’ said the steward; ‘I had clean forgotten old Barberry, who is in the kitchen waiting to speak to me. My memory is going, I believe. It was high time for me to recall Beavis to assist me. I shall be back directly.’

Mr. Worthivale left the room.

‘You have heard, Lucy?’ said Beavis in a low tone.

‘Yes, dear, I have heard what I presume you allude to—that the Marquess is engaged.’

‘It is both his father’s wish and that of his uncles. I urged it strongly on him.’

‘I am very glad,’ said Lucy; ‘I hope she is worthy of him. Grace is startled, and does not know what to make of the tidings. She ought to rejoice, but cannot till she knows the lady.’

Beavis took his sister’s head between his hands and kissed her on the forehead. ‘What is for the good of the House gives us the greatest happiness,’ he said.

She looked him frankly in the eyes and smiled, but there was moisture in her eyes and her lips quivered. She saw that Beavis had read the secret of her heart, which she had never confessed even to herself. She pressed his hand to her bosom. Then Mr. Worthivale came in.

‘Tiresome old man!’ said the steward. ‘Like all the rest, Barberry wants something. The farmer must have a new calves’ house, and the cotter a fresh pigsty. No one is content with the accommodation that suited his fore-

fathers. Barberry came here with a box for Joan, which he had brought in his cart from the station, and being here thought he might as well make a demand on his Grace's pocket. I have said I would look to the linney. He wants to have one for his carrier's cart. I can't see that the Duke is bound to build him one. If a man buys a donkey his Grace must build a shed for it; and if a woman catches a bullfinch the Duke must provide her with a cage. Hark! Good Lord, what is the matter?' He ran to the door and opened it.

'What is that noise? Who is squalling?'

'Please, sir,' said Emily, 'it is only Joanna.'

'Only Joanna! Has she scalded herself? What is the noise about? Send her down to me. Why are you laughing?'

'Yes, sir,' said the maid; 'I'll tell her you want to see her, sir.'

Presently Joanna came down, her face flushed, in great excitement.

'What was that row about?' asked Mr. Worthivale, still in the hall. 'Were you and Emily having romps or tickling each other? Or have you hurt yourself? I care not. I will not have a caterwauling in my house. Why, bless my soul! the Duke or one of their lordships

might have been here, and then—what would have been thought of my house, I should like to know? What made you scream, or laugh, or cry, or whatever was the noise I heard?’

‘Please, sir,’ said Joanna, half crying, ‘it is too bad! I had set my heart on it, and now it is utterly spoiled.’

‘What is spoiled?’

‘The pink silk.’

‘Pink silk! What pink silk?’

‘Oh, sir! I had a beautiful pink silk dress, and as there was to be a dance at Court Royal for the tenants and servants, I sent to Plymouth to have it forwarded.’

‘Pink silk! What next! *You* come out in pink silk!’

‘Lady Grace has been teaching me to dance. Miss Lucy can tell you, sir; she has helped.’

‘But—that does not justify pink silk.’

‘I can’t wear it; it is spoiled,’ said Joanna in a doleful voice. ‘The Ems Water has run all over it.’

‘Ems Water!’ gasped Mr. Worthivale. ‘What have you to do with Ems Water?’

‘Please, sir, the master put in three bottles

with the pink silk, because, he said, the change of diet here might have heated my blood, and something cooling and lowering——’

‘The master! —What master? — Colonel Delany?’

‘No, sir, not Colonel Delany; another master.’

‘What, a doctor? I did not know you had been with a doctor.’

‘He was not exactly a doctor—but he did bleed people pretty freely.’

‘Oh, a surgeon. Right. Only the ignorant call surgeons by the title of doctor.’

‘And one of the bottles of Ems Water is broken. I found it broken in the box, and the water has wetted and stained my dear, beautiful dress. I shall never be able to wear it now—never!’

‘That is what you cried out about, is it?’

‘Yes.’

‘Go upstairs, and thank your stars the Ems Water did spoil your pink silk; you would only have made yourself ridiculous had you appeared in it.’

Then Mr. Worthivale returned to the drawing-room. There was no need for him to repeat the story. The door had been left open, and

his son and daughter had heard, and were laughing over, Joanna's misadventure.

Joanna went to her room, half in wrath, half in sorrow. She opened the window and dashed from it the two remaining bottles, casting them into a large bank of rhododendrons.

'That is the end of you,' she said. 'Now there are but three left at the Golden Balls. I wonder what will become of them.'

'Sit down,' said Mr. Worthivale. 'I have sent for you, Lucy, and you, Beavis, to meet me here, because a crisis has arrived in the affairs of the Kingsbridge house—because an emergency has arisen which we shall have to meet, and I do not see how it can be met—except in one way.' He paused and looked at his daughter, then at his son. 'I suppose you know that the Marquess is engaged to be married to a young lady of immense fortune, a lady not in his position, a commoner, but of respectable family. Her father belongs to a Norfolk house; he was a younger son, and sought his fortune in Ceylon, coffee-planting. What he sought he found. He has returned to England worth enough to extinguish some of the charges on the Kingsbridge estate. Now we may look to the ducal House flourishing and putting forth

leaves in old style once more. I am glad. I confess I was despondent at one time. But one should not despair. I have learnt a lesson. There is a special Providence which watches over our great and glorious Aristocracy.'

Mr. Worthivale drew a sigh of relief and touched his breast with his right hand, much as though he were crying 'Peccavi, I have sinned, in that for a season my faith in the English Aristocracy was shaken. I have now passed through the trial; my faith is restored to me.'

'There is one thing I must mention,' continued the steward. 'I have called you together, not only to announce to you that a turn in the affairs of the House has been reached, but also to impress on you the fact that a supreme effort is needed to bring these affairs to a conclusion. Of course the father of the young lady, and the young lady herself, have been invited to Court Royal for Christmas. Their reception must be splendid. It will never do to allow Mr. Rigsby to see that the family is pinched. Now Christmas is one of the most distressing seasons to a well-ordered mind. It means the influx of bills, the demand for boxes, the payment of annuities, and what is due on mortgages and

loans of various sorts ; add to these the very copious customary charities. I know that, theoretically and theologically, Christmas is all right, and a festival, and a time of rejoicing, but practically it is the contrary, even to those in affluent circumstances. They cannot escape the annoyances if they are not sensible of the suffering caused by Christmas. I am sorry to say that the closing year will find us in a worse predicament than last. I have strained every nerve to meet our liabilities, but have not been as successful as I could have desired—indeed, to be plain, I have been very unsuccessful. Very heavy charges have to be met, and I do not know where to turn to find the money. The older mortgages are held by insurance offices, and I am afraid to fall in arrear to them. The newer mortgages I do not see how I can meet, and find the money that is wanted for current expenditure. Just now the expenses of the house cannot be reduced. The Rigsbys are coming, and we must find a good deal of money for their entertainment ; balls and dinner-parties must be given on a large scale. The old gentleman must be impressed with the greatness of the family into which he is to be received. I do not see how we can

press payment from the farmers; their sheep have been diseased, and they have lost entire flocks. The Americans have beaten the wheat they grow below the cost of growing. The importation of foreign cattle has reduced the price of home-grown meat. I have sounded the tenants, and they give me no hope of paying arrears. Now all we want is time. The marriage of the Marquess will relieve the pressure, if not remove it altogether. We must manage somehow to tide over the time till that takes place. Lord Ronald very generously placed three thousand pounds at our disposal, but we want at least as much more. We must prevent the evil from coming to a head before the marriage takes place. As I said before, we have only one thing to consider—how to gain time.'

Mr. Worthivale looked at his son, then at his daughter, questioningly, entreatingly.

'I apprehend your meaning,' said Beavis. 'You ask me to sanction what you have already resolved on in your own heart, the sinking our little savings—I mean yours: I have nothing—in the Kingsbridge debt. The money is yours. It is what you have laid by. Do with it what you will. I will not reproach you.'

‘It is not that exactly,’ said Mr. Worthivale, rubbing his hands nervously together. ‘Most providentially, most providentially, I say,’ with great emphasis on the word, ‘I took my money out of Argentine bonds in time—before they went to zero.’

‘Well, father, and then.’

‘Then—I looked about for a safe investment, and really, upon my word, I saw none better than a small mortgage on the Charlecombe estate of the Duke’s.’

‘Very well. It is there. What then do you want?’

‘If I had left it in the Argentines,’ argued Mr. Worthivale, ‘I should have had nothing for it.’

‘And have you drawn your interest since?’

‘Not of late,’ answered the steward. ‘There have been other and more pressing demands.’

‘Then what do you want us to consent to, father?’

Mr. Worthivale fidgeted with his hands and feet, then, whilst feeling the button of his collar, which he pretended was coming off, he said, shyly, ‘There is Lucy’s four thousand pounds, left her by her mother.’

‘No,’ said Beavis sharply; ‘they shall not be touched.’

‘Beavis,’ exclaimed his sister, ‘I entreat you, do not deprive me of the pleasure, the pride, of contributing my little share.’

‘No,’ said her brother hotly, ‘I will never consent to this.’

‘Then you will deprive me of a great happiness. I have spent my life, so far, at Court Royal, lived on the kindness of the dear people there. They have loved me as if I were of their blood. The Duke makes no distinction between me and his own daughter. Lord Ronald is kindness itself. I would give my heart’s blood for Lady Grace. Oh, Beavis! you are cruel. Do you not understand that it is a privilege and a pleasure to do something, to sacrifice something, for those one loves? Let the money go. Who cares?’

‘No, Lucy, emphatically no,’ said Beavis firmly.

‘The money is now in the Consols at three per cent.,’ said Mr. Worthivale. ‘Really, Beavis, I think you unreasonable. I can get four-and-a-half for Lucy if I lend it to the Duke—on security of course. There is absolutely no risk. Lord Saltcombe will be married

within six months, and at once, if you desire it, the money can be replaced in the Funds.'

'It shall not be taken out.'

'Beavis,' said the steward testily, 'I am not responsible to you. I am trustee of my daughter's money, and she is old enough to know her own mind. I did not wish to do anything without your knowledge, but I am not bound to follow your advice. If I thought there was the smallest doubt about the safety of the money, I would not make this proposal; but I have not a shadow of doubt. All I want is time; with time everything will come right.'

'I protest,' said Beavis.

'Beavis!' exclaimed Lucy, throwing her arms round his neck, and hiding her face on his shoulder, to conceal the tears that were gathering in her eyes; 'Beavis, it goes to my heart to oppose you in anything, but in this I am as resolute as yourself. Father, you have my full consent. Do not listen to my brother. Oh, Beavis! I am ready to do all I can—for dear Lady Grace's sake.'

Then Beavis sighed.

'It is as you will, Lucy. I am powerless to do more than protest. When a great ship founders, it draws down all the vessels round it into the abyss.'

CHAPTER XXIII.

REFLORESCENCE.

COURT ROYAL resumed its old appearance. Invitations were sent round, and the whole of South Devon was thrilled with expectation. There was to be a succession of dinner-parties and a splendid ball, which would be attended by the officers from Plymouth and Exeter, and by all the young ladies of position in the neighbourhood. For some years the Duke had given no great entertainments. His health furnished the excuse; now, in spite of his health, Court Royal was to become the scene of festivities on a large scale.

Not only were the gentry to be entertained, but the tenants were to have a dance as well—the usual Christmas dance, greatly magnified. So all classes were pleased, all looked forward with eagerness to the arrival of the Marquess, which was to be the signal for the commencement of the gaieties.

The secret was well kept. None knew of the engagement except the Worthivales, and their lips were sealed. The Duke and Lord Ronald confided nothing to their acquaintances, and yet it was clear to all that something of importance had occasioned this divergence from the routine of retirement. The servants suspected it, and were eager to make Court Royal as splendid and hospitable as it should be. They spared themselves no pains, and they invited all their friends and friends' most distant acquaintances to partake of the profusion.

The Rigsbys would arrive a few days after the Marquess, from Plymouth, where they had taken a house for the winter. Mr. Rigsby thought Torquay too relaxing, yet the proximity to the sea advisable for his daughter.

Lord and Lady Pomeroy and their daughter, the Earl of Stratton and the Ladies Evelyn and Augusta Burrington, Lord and Lady Dawlish, Sir Henry Hillersdon of Membland and his party, were expected to stay in the Court over the ball. The house was so large, it could contain a regiment. New liveries were ordered for the servants. The paper-hangers, the painters of Kingsbridge were occupied in re-

decorating several of the rooms. Supplies of every sort were ordered from local grocers, wine-merchants, butchers, fishmongers. The Duke patronised local tradesmen. He disliked co-operative stores. He would rather pay than break a tradition. The carriages were re-lined, new carriages and additional horses purchased. The only person who did not seem to share in the general excitement was Lady Grace. She moved about the house with her usual composure, looked after the flowers, saw that everyone had a sweet and well-assorted bouquet in his room, had a kind word for the servants whom she passed or came on engaged on dusting and polishing, and was interested in the work of the tradesmen, watched them and asked them questions. There was not a person who came within the circle of her influence, and that was everyone to whom she spoke, who would not have sprung into the fire had she desired it.

She was glad that at last her brother was engaged. She had been his close companion for some years, and she felt an ache in her heart that they were now to be parted, but she had never become her brother's confidante, and she knew that it was well for him to find a

sympathetic woman's soul to which he could open his inmost thoughts. Such a woman she trusted Dulcina Rigsby would prove. She was ready to receive her with love because she was Saltcombe's ideal, and his ideal must be perfect.

Lucy was not as much with her as usual. Lucy was a ready, intelligent, active manager; she saw to everything. Mrs. Probus was old and slow. At her father's request, Lucy took on her own shoulders the care of preparing for the visitors and the entertainments. She was pleased to be occupied, she worked restlessly, she was not quiet for one moment in the day. Lady Grace reproached her for doing everything herself, without imposing any task on her.

'Yours will come when the house is full, and you have to entertain,' answered Lucy; 'leave me to make preparations.'

Lucy was the inseparable companion of Lady Grace, her right hand; she loved her with an adoring devotion, received all her thoughts, and devoted herself to ward off all unpleasantnesses from her friend.

Lady Grace was in the room prepared for Miss Rigsby, adjoining which was another for

her aunt, Miss Stokes. She was arranging the flowers on the dressing-table, some white jessamine and pink geranium, and a spray of maiden-hair fern. She only touched them with the points of her taper fingers, and they fell into place.

‘Do you know, dearest,’ she said to Lucy, ‘I believe that this engagement will make me perfectly happy. It has been a trouble to me that Saltcombe has been here so long without pursuits, squandering his life and his brilliant talents. I have never understood him, though he has stood nearer to me than anyone else. He is melancholy, as though lamenting something, but he has nothing to regret; or as longing for something, but he has made no effort to attain what he longs for. Which is it? That has been a puzzle to me, and it has distressed me to be unable to unriddle it. Now he has found some one after his own heart, and now real life will open to him. He will put forth his energies, he will wake out of a dream, and we shall find that he will make for himself a place in the history of the present time. All our ancestors have been men of note, though one or two noted only as spend-thrifts; yet all have taken some part in politics,

or as patrons of literature or art, and I cannot believe my brother will be content to reckon as a cipher. He seems to me to be one who has either been wrecked when first starting, or as one who has never yet started on the great voyage of adventure—which is life. He cannot have undergone shipwreck—that is impossible, or I should have heard of his disaster; now he is about to start. He has been waiting for the precious lading to fill the empty hold of his heart. Now that is in, the anchor will be weighed, the pennant run to mast-top, the white sails be spread; and with a cheer from all of us who stand on the shore, the gallant vessel will start.'

'I believe you are right, Grace,' said Lucy.

'I do long so to see my future sister-in-law; my heart yearns to love her. Do not be jealous, darling, nothing will ever make me love another as I love you. No one can ever be to me the sweet, strong, enduring friend—the sister that you have been. Do you know, I have been teasing Uncle Ronald about Dulcina. I don't like the name, do you? He has seen her. When he heard they were at Plymouth, he went down to call on them in Saltcombe's yacht. I have asked him a thou-

sand questions about her, but I cannot get much out of the General. Men are so funny; they have no descriptive faculty. All he can say is that she is amiable. Well, amiable is one of those unpleasant words which mean nothing—worse than nothing. When you don't want to say an unkind thing about persons, and you know no good of them, you describe them as *amiable*. I am sure Uncle Ronald does not mean that. It is only his clumsy man's way of describing a lady. She has auburn hair and a pale face. I managed to extract that from him, and the father is tall and burnt brown. Uncle Ronald can tell me much more about Mr. Rigsby than he can about Dulcina.'

The Archdeacon and Lady Elizabeth arrived. The excellent curate could be trusted to manage the parish, feed all the fledglings on sop, and the adults on wind. Lord Edward hastened at once to the Duke's room before he went to his own apartments. The Duke was expecting him, excited, but disguising his excitement. For the last hour he had been looking at his watch every five minutes. The brothers greeted each other with great cordiality.

'Have I not managed well?' asked the

Archdeacon. 'Who will deny that I am a man of business?'

'I am much indebted to you, Edward. Without your help we should never have got Saltcombe away from this place. I hope she is a suitable person.'

'She has plenty of money,' answered the Archdeacon, looking down abashed.

'But, Edward! money is a very small consideration. I am sorry he has not chosen one in his own position. Still—if she is a lady, and one likely to make him happy, I shall not object. What attracted him to her? Is she very beautiful? Fair, I understand. I cannot get much out of Ronald; he is either unobservant or reticent.'

'Fair, fair of course,' answered Lord Edward. 'I should not call her exactly a beauty, but then men's tastes differ. I really am no judge of women's faces, I have other things to look at—the Fathers, and the Diocesan Charity accounts.'

'But you can surely tell me something more than Ronald. I should like particulars. Are her manners easy and polished?'

'I should not say exactly polished in the old acceptation of the word. Easy they are,

I suppose. She makes herself at home in your house at once, and is rather exacting. But then her father spoils her. She turns him round her finger. It is really a study to see how she manages him. That is good; she will exert herself to direct Saltcombe, and make something of him.'

'I hope so,' said the Duke.

'I am sure of it. I am sanguine that the marriage will be a happy one.'

'I have seen little of Saltcombe since he returned the day before yesterday. He is shy, as you may understand, of speaking on such a topic to me. He always was a reserved man, and now his reserve is intensified.'

'I will go and see him myself,' said Lord Edward. 'I suppose the Rigsbys will be here to-day.'

'I expect them by the next train. They will be here for dinner. We have invited no one for to-day, but every other day of their visit is provided for.'

The Archdeacon hurried to his nephew's apartments. He was a man of business, and before he attended to himself he was determined to have everyone else in order. He found Lord Saltcombe by himself in his sitting-

room, pretending to read. He shook him warmly by the hand. 'Saltcombe,' he said, 'remember what is expected of you. I have done all that I can, so has Elizabeth. Upon my word, I believe the girl is in love with you, over head and ears. Now, for heaven's sake, do not spoil everything by faintheartedness at the last. Keep your spirits up. Show a good face before your father. There is a great deal in the girl. It only wants drawing out. Her father has spoiled her, and her natural excellence is a little obscured, that is all. I like her, and think she will make a first-rate wife. Lord Edward saw everything in rosy light.

A couple of hours later the carriages arrived. Two had been sent to Kingsbridge Road station. Mr. Rigsby, his daughter, and Miss Stokes were in the first, a fine new carriage with splendid appointments; Miss Rigsby's maid alone in the second with the parcels, and the boxes on the roof. Mr. Rigsby dispensed with a valet.

The evening was fine, the sun cast his last golden rays over the house, and the park looked its best to greet its future mistress.

Lady Grace and Lucy came to the entrance hall; Lord Edward and the Marquess were

there as well, to receive the guests. Dulcina looked about her with surprise and admiration which lent vivacity to her face; unfortunately the setting sun sent its saffron rays over her; her complexion was naturally pasty: in the sunlight she looked sallow. Lucy Worthivale stood back, unnoticed, watching Dulcina attentively. Then she hastened to Miss Stokes, and offered to relieve her of some of her wraps.

Dulcina wore a tall hat, boat-shaped, with a great dancing plume in it. She could not have chosen a head-dress less suitable to her style. Colour came into Lady Grace's cheeks for a moment when she met and saw her future sister-in-law for the first time, but not a muscle of her features moved. She greeted her with gentle cordiality that won Dulcina's confidence immediately. The Marquess turned pale when he saw the young lady in her hideous hat, standing in the yellow blaze, looking plain, almost vulgar, but he speedily recovered himself and behaved with courtesy and geniality.

'Upon my word!' exclaimed Mr. Rigsby, looking round, 'what a place you have! Why, you English nobles are princes indeed.'

Mr. Rigsby and his daughter were re-

ceived by the Duke in the drawing-room ; the audience was very short. Dulcina was carried off almost before the Duke could make out what she was like, and conveyed by Lady Grace and Lucy to her apartments. She looked about her eagerly : on the stairs, in the corridors ; she said little, she was oppressed by the stateliness and splendour about her, to which she was wholly unaccustomed, brought up in a wooden bungalow in the coffee plantations of Ceylon, far from society and from settled habitations.

When she had been taken to her rooms the Marquess went to his own. He was followed by Beavis, who had kept in the background. He had observed Miss Rigsby as attentively as had his sister. He was unnoticed, and able to study her unrestrainedly. From his love for Lord Saltcombe, and because he had himself urged him to this engagement, he was eager to judge favourably of Dulcina ; but in spite of this prepossession he was unfavourably impressed. It was not merely her complexion and tasteless dress which displeased his critical eye. He thought he saw in her a selfish, querulous spirit, and a lack of womanly tenderness.

The geniality of her father, his eagerness to forestall her wishes, to screen her from all vexations, met with no recognition, were accepted as a right, and awoke no gratitude.

When he came into Lord Saltcombe's room he found his friend in the arm-chair by the fire, his head resting in his hand, seeming pale and dispirited. The Marquess looked up, and with a faint smile said, 'Well, old fellow, come to congratulate me? Satisfied with what you have done? Now, tell me, on your honour, your opinion of *ma fiancée*.'

Beavis *was* confused. He felt some self-reproach. He could not expect that his friend would find happiness at the side of such a dry stick as Dulcina.

'What do you think of her?' asked Lord Saltcombe again.

'I have had only a glimpse. I have not as yet exchanged a word with her.'

'Tell me frankly, are you struck with her?'

'I will speak to you frankly. She is not bad-looking at all. We are so accustomed here to see lovely complexions, that one spoilt by the sun of the south seems to us strange. She has a profusion of warm-coloured hair and good teeth.'

‘This is not fair, Beavis. You are cataloguing what I am competent to catalogue myself. She has a nose, and eyes, and fingers and feet. The latter small, the ankles good.’

‘What do you want?’

‘What do you think of her character?’

‘Now you are unreasonable with me, Saltcombe. I have seen her for a few moments only, and you demand what you have no right to expect, and what would be unfair to her. I will tell you more after I have had a talk with her.’

‘You are evading my question. I want your first impressions.’

‘Then you shall have them. I think she has been spoiled. What has been spoiled it will be your place to restore. What lies below the surface, what has been crippled and what stunted by mismanagement, I cannot tell. I never will believe in any woman being other than an angel.’

‘Is it possible to make good what is broken?’

‘There are crippled hearts as well as crippled limbs. Miss Rigsby is young: kindness and firmness may put the crippled heart

to rights ; it is only warped by having been allowed to twist as it liked, unrestrained.'

'Thank you, Beavis. You set me a task. You are determined to make me work against my will. I am marrying without love, without regard even, because it is a family necessity. Perhaps the union will turn out well in spite of its being loveless. The French system of *mariage de convenance* is not so bad as novelists would have us suppose, and the love matches these misleaders of youth extol are generally disastrous. Young folks idealise each other, and their marriage is a miserable disenchantment. Where two take each other without any expectation of finding any treasure, every discovery of a good quality, every peaceful pleasure in marriage, comes on them as a surprise, and they are delighted in the end to find each other worth having.'

The Marquess laughed, but constrainedly. Beavis looked at him sadly, sympathetically. He was afraid to speak. He doubted what to say.

Mr. Rigsby gave his key to a manservant, who unpacked his portmanteau for him. He had been accustomed to attend on himself, and was impatient of having this taken from him. He stood with his hands in his pockets, looking

on. Then he went to his daughter's room, tapped, and walked in.

‘Well, Dullie, what do you think of this? Is not the house magnificent? Did you ever see such livery before, and such a lot of it? Buff and scarlet, red plush breeches——’

‘Really, James,’ exclaimed Miss Stokes, ‘would you—would you be more constrained in tongue before ladies?’

‘Lord bless me!’ exclaimed the old planter, ‘what is wrong? If they wear ’em, mayn’t one speak of them?’

‘Papa!’ cried Dulcina, ‘you must observe the decencies of speech, if not before me, before the great folks here.’

‘Great folks,’ said Mr. Rigsby; ‘I believe you, Dullie. They are great folks indeed! Tell me, now, is not everything here magnificent?’

‘Oh, all is very nice.’

‘Nice! Superb! You do not employ proper expressions. You never saw the like in your wildest dreams, because the like is not to be found out of old England.’

‘I suppose there are the courts of the native princes in India——’

‘Native fiddlesticks!’ exclaimed Mr. Rigsby.

‘Really, really, James,’ interposed Miss Stokes, ‘would you allow my niece to finish her sentences? She cannot endure interruptions: you shake her nerves. Moreover, the expression is burlesque and improper.’

‘I was only about to remark,’ said the abashed Rigsby, ‘that Dulcina has seen no native princes. There are none in Ceylon, and she has not been on a visit to Maharajas on the continent.’

‘If she has not, she has read of their palaces and heard of their state.’

‘They are nothing to the mansions of our nobility. And, Dullie, my dear, the beauty is that you will one day be mistress here. Listen! Don’t it sound well, Dulcina, Duchess of Kingsbridge? Upon my word, I will have you painted in a ducal coronet and red velvet mantle turned up with ermine. My dear, look round here on everything as your own. The old cock can’t last long.’

‘What old cock, papa?’

‘I mean the Duke.’

‘Really, James, really!’ exclaimed Miss Stokes.

CHAPTER XXIV.

CAUGHT NAPPING.

NEVER within man's memory had there been such a succession of gaieties at Court Royal as at this Christmas season. The weather was favourable, bright and mild, as is so frequent in these days, when the seasons, as the world of men and manners, are out of joint. The climate of the south coast of Devon, especially of that favoured portion about the Kingsbridge estuary and the mouths of the Erme, the Avon, and the Yealm, is like that of Penzance. Oranges, myrtles, geraniums grow in the open air, and frosts do not fall sharply on the vegetation in winter.

With an ebbing tide the Marquess took a party down the creek in his yacht to Bolt Head. The sun was brilliant, and under the rocks on the sands the air was so soft and summery that luncheon was spread and taken

out of doors. They returned by moonlight. The yacht was illuminated with coloured lanterns ; an awning was spread on deck to cut off the falling dews ; a band played, and the party danced. The villagers along the shore turned out to watch the glittering vessel as she ran up with the flowing tide, and listen to the strains of music wafted over the water.

Miss Rigsby caught cold on this expedition, and could not appear for a few days. Lord Saltcombe inquired after her health formally two or three times every day, and secretly felt relieved that he was off duty for a while.

When Dulcina reappeared in public her nose was red and glistening—red because it had been much rubbed, glistening because glycerine had been applied to reduce the soreness of the organ. Miss Rigsby's temper had not been at its prime whilst she was unwell, and Miss Stokes's patience and good nature were tried. Dulcina was not even pleased with the Marquess. The trip in the yacht had been planned by him. 'Who ever heard of such nonsense,' she said, 'as a picnic and a dance *al fresco* at Christmas! Did the creature want to kill me? Is he tired of me already?'

'Oh, dearest Dullie,' answered the aunt,

‘forgive him. He has become delirious with love. He cannot do enough to please you. He is always inventing some excuse to be with you. If he acted foolishly, forgive; you have driven the wits out of him. I never saw devotion so delicate, and at the same time so passionate, in all my experience.’

‘That is not saying much,’ snapped Dulcina. ‘You haven’t had much experience of love, aunt, I will be bound.’

Never was Mr. Rigsby in finer feather than at Court Royal. At dinner he worked the conversation into the groove of coffee-planting, in which he could run for hours. Then, when he had got it on his subject, he poured forth his experience on coffee, and absorbed the entire conversation till coffee itself came in on a silver tray and stopped his mouth. He talked also a good deal on Indian affairs, and pretended intimacy with all the viceroys, lieutenant-governors, chief commissioners, and British Residents and native princes for the last quarter of a century. He knew the secret history of all that had been done and neglected. He had in his hands the clue to all the tangles, financial and political, of the empire. What might he not expect, when father-in-law to a

Marquess, with the influence of a great Duke to back him? Surely, he might aspire to the viceroyalty! He would take nothing less. So he talked long and loud, and made himself a general bore, in the firm belief that he was stamping on the minds of the Duke, the Earl of Stratton, Lord Dawlish, Lord Pomeroy, and all the distinguished guests at the table, that he, Rigsby, was the man England wanted to do in India everything that ought to be done, and to undo every muddle made by every preceding governor. Mr. Rigsby was not a vulgar man, but he was a man without tact; preoccupied with his own ideas, he regarded no one else. This was the secret of his success in life. He had gone forward with the one idea of making money, and he had made it. Now he had got hold of the notion that he was about to make himself a name in Eastern politics, and he therefore talked down and contradicted everyone who attempted to turn the conversation or to dispute his views.

The Marquess played his part in the Comedy of Love with resolution and patience. He was devoted in his attention to Miss Rigsby; he did his utmost to draw out her better qualities. These were few; she had read little,

observed little, associated little with superior persons. She regarded her father, though she tyrannised over him. She ruled as a despot over her feeble aunt, a person of inferior culture, and no mind. There was some kindness of heart in her, but most of her thoughts were on herself. Her taste was detestable, uncultivated and originally defective. Here Lady Grace came to the aid of her brother; she ingratiated herself into the confidence of Dulcina, and advised her how to dress; she did so with such delicate adroitness that Miss Rigsby had no idea she was receiving and obeying advice.

Mr. Worthivale was radiant. The cloud that had hung over the house was rolling away; the golden age was returning. His spirits bounded with the hopeful prospects. Not within his memory could Beavis recall a time when he was so extravagantly magnificent in his building of cloud-castles and in throwing golden bridges over Sloughs of Despond. Court Royal was itself again. The old splendour revived; the old hospitality extended on all sides. Not for one moment did the thought cross the steward's horizon and trouble it, that this revival was due to Lucy's fortune. Nor was his

daughter more concerned than he. Generous, self-sacrificing, devoted heart and soul to the family, she was ready to give everything without demanding a return, without grudging if it were lost.

It was other with Beavis. He knew exactly how matters stood. He knew the extent of the peril. He knew whose money paid for all these gaities and stopped the mouths of the clamorous creditors. For himself he did not care, but for his sister he cared a great deal. A sense of uneasiness that he could not shake off oppressed his spirits. He looked on at the festivities; he partook of them with perception of their hollowness and without enjoying them.

On the evening of the ball he was present, standing in a recessed window, half screened by the blue silk curtains, looking on in a dreamy state—the cloud of apprehension hanging over him—conscious at the moment, however, only of irritation at the dance strains of Strauss, which seemed to his fastidious ear as music full of unclean *double-entendre* unsuitable for such a place and such company.

The ball-room, built by Frederick Augustus, Duke of Kingsbridge, was a noble hall, lighted by two cut-glass lustres of great size. It was

painted in panels with pastoral subjects, divided by pilasters of white and gold. The ceiling was of plaster flower-work containing paintings; walls and ceiling were the work of French artists, brought over for the purpose by the art- and splendour-loving Frederick Augustus.

The Duke appeared for a short while, but his delicate condition of health did not permit a long stay. He was surrounded on his appearance by a cluster of ladies, eager for a word and one of his charming speeches full of old-world courtesy and wit.

Beavis did not go to him. For a while, on his appearance, the music ceased, then the doors were flung open, and two Highland pipers entered, one an immense man with sandy hair. They strode up the ball-room to the Duke's chair, stood there a moment playing, then turned sharply and strode down the room still playing, made a second circuit, and disappeared. They were the pipers of a Highland regiment stationed at Exeter.

After this diversion the Duke retired with an apology, and the dancing recommenced with vigour. Then it was, whilst teased by a waltz of Strauss, that Beavis was startled by a voice at his elbow—a soft, low voice, a voice

not to be mistaken. He turned and saw Lady Grace.

‘Mr. Beavis,’ she said, ‘how have I offended you? You have not asked me to dance with you once to-night; but see’—she held out her tablet to him—‘I have put you down, unsolicited, for the next quadrille.’

His eye caught a single B on the place indicated. He coloured with pleasure, and looked his gratitude without speaking.

‘We have not had a confidential talk together for an age,’ she said in her gentle tones, so soft, yet quite distinct; ‘and I want it. Dear Lucy has been engaged night and day, and could spare me none of her precious time. Besides, she is reserved with me on the subject of all others that occupies my thoughts. I have no one to speak to but yourself, and I can only speak with you in the midst of a ball. You will be candid with me, will you not? You are a crystal moorstream, and when I look in I see the spars and the sparkling mica, even the grains of black hornblende. Now I want to look in and find what is the gravel over which your clear thoughts run.’

She smiled. The look of her sweet eyes, the dimple on her delicate cheek, the flutter of

the throat, the intonation of the voice, were full of pleading.

‘Dear Lady Grace,’ answered Beavis, ‘you know that I am devoted to your service. I can deny you nothing.’

‘Then, Mr. Beavis, be frank with me. I know how kind and good you and all your family are. You are too kind, if I may dare say that. I mean that to spare me a moment’s pain you would cover up from my eyes all the little black grains. But, I pray you, let me have the very truth. Hide nothing ; let me see all I ask to see. Will you not trust me? Am I a coward to turn pale and fly at the sight of a spider? I am stronger than you think. I can bear more than you give me credit for. That which tortures me most of all is uncertainty. You will trust me—do, pray!’

She put her fingers to her fan beseechingly, and looked at him.

‘What do you desire to know, Lady Grace?’ he asked with restraint. There were things he could not tell her, however suppliantly and sweetly she might plead.

‘I cannot understand my brother’s engagement. Does he love her? Does he admire her? I have tried my best. I have done all

I can't find out what there is admirable in her, and I cannot like her ; I can only endure her, and that only for a little while. I thought that I knew Herbert so well ; what he likes I like, and what I fancy he fancies ; in that we are almost as tied as twins, but in this one matter I have no sympathy with him. You do not know, Mr. Beavis, how I have striven to regard her as a sister. I cannot ; I cannot do it ! But it is not *that* that troubles me. I would never let her suppose I could not love her, but I am not sure that Herbert loves her. I cannot think they will be happy together. What *is* the attraction in her ?'

She looked round to make sure that she was not overheard.

'I had a battle with myself ; at last I plucked up sufficient courage to approach the subject with him. You know that she has had a bad cold, and has kept her room. During this time I have been able to talk to my brother and walk with him, with my hand through his arm, on the terrace, whilst he smokes, just as before this—this affair. I have crept very near to the question that perplexes me, but he will not allow me to touch it. He glances aside and bids me keep at arm's length. He

turns the conversation to indifferent subjects, and then my heart sinks. Only once did I wring anything like an answer from him, and that was "Beavis approves." That was referring me to you, was it not? That is why I speak now. O prithee tell me the truth! Why do you approve?'

Beavis looked down. What could he answer?

'I have not had much conversation with Saltcombe since his engagement,' he answered in a low tone. He blushed as he spoke, for it was an evasion, but he could not help himself.

'Oh, Mr. Beavis!' she exclaimed, with pain and discouragement in her expressive voice, 'you are playing with me. I asked for the truth, and you throw up a soap-bubble!'

'Lady Grace,' he said gravely, 'this is not the place, nor have we now the time, for speaking on this matter. I must, unworthy as I may seem, ask you to do that which I appear unwilling to do to you. I must ask you to trust me. I do approve of Saltcombe's engagement—I may add, I advised it. This latter was a responsibility—a terrible one; nevertheless, I took it upon me. I did advise this engagement.'

‘So did Uncle Edward, I know, and Aunt Elizabeth as well,’ said Lady Grace sadly. ‘I am treated like a child. I am given no reasons. I can hardly bear it. I am no longer a child; I am growing into the old woman.’

‘Never, never, Lady Grace! with a heart as fresh and a spirit as bright as a May morning.’

She smiled very faintly, almost imperceptibly, slight dimples forming at the corners of her mouth. The tears were very near the surface.

‘I must trust you,’ she said. Then, thinking she had spoken grudgingly and ungenerously, she looked up and said, ‘I trust you frankly, freely, from the bottom of my soul. Excuse my petulance, my curiosity. From the days of Eve woman has wanted to know what she had better not know!’

Beavis was uneasy. He felt that she was hurt by his want of confidence—hurt and disappointed. He knew that this disappointment would cost her tears when alone. He could not do otherwise. He could not tell her that this marriage was *de convenance*, one for money, and money only. Her healthy, pure mind would recoil from such a truth. She would

think such a union unholy, dishonouring. But it was necessary. She did not know the bankrupt condition of the family. If told it, she would not realise it. If she did realise it, she would refuse to sanction escape from it by such means. Beavis knew this. He could see into that transparent soul better far than she could look into his.

‘The quadrille is forming,’ she said ; ‘let us take our places.’

They did so under one of the great chandeliers.

How beautiful was the scene : the background of old paintings and white and gold, the brilliant light from above, the brightly polished floor of inlaid woods, the figures in gay colours—the turquoise blue, the eschscholtzia yellow, the carnation pink, the lily white—flickering in and out like pieces in a kaleidoscope. The beautiful faces, bright eyes, the various hairs—golden, chestnut brown, black—the flash of diamonds, the flowers—how lovely was the scene ! Yet, lovely above every person and every object there, incomparable in every way, Beavis thought Lady Grace—not wrongly, not with any exaggeration. Incomparable she was in white and the palest blue

satin, so pale as to be scarcely blue at all, with aquamarine parure, and a cross of the same hanging from her necklet and resting on her pure bosom. The delicate blue veins in her temples and on her throat and bosom showed through her transparent skin. Her eyes were of deep violet blue—the only dark colour about her. In her cheeks was the faintest tinge of rose. Lady Grace, as has been said before, was not a young girl ; she was sliding out of youth. But age, as it drew on, added sweetness to her face ; it gave expression where it withdrew bloom.

Miss Rigsby flared by in yellow and red ; the Misses Sheepwash were in the same quadrille, hot with dancing, their cheeks aflame, and their fans working vigorously ; they were bouncing girls.

Beavis turned his eyes away. He looked at his partner, moving easily, without exertion, full of grace in every undulation. It was a delight to the eye to rest on her.

She did not look at Beavis during the dance. When he had the chance he said, ‘I have offended you——’

‘No, you cannot do that ; only disappointed me.’

‘I cannot help myself. I am obliged to say, Trust me. I can do no other. Rely on me that I advise nothing which is not best for your brother and your family; best attainable, I mean, not ideally best.’

He had to lead her across in the dance. She slightly pressed his hand. It was to say, ‘I trust.’

When she returned to his side she said, ‘Do me a favour. Poor Miss Stokes is sitting yonder, the picture of woebegonedness. Please me by dancing once with her. You do not know how dreadful the world seems to a young lady who has been a wallflower one whole night. A single round alters the aspect of life.’

In the country there is generally a preponderance of ladies at a ball. It was not so on this occasion at Court Royal. Officers had been invited from Plymouth and Exeter, so that every young lady—except Miss Stokes, who was not young, but refused to consider herself old—found a partner, and every young lady said afterwards that this was the most perfect ball she had ever attended. Even Miss Stokes said it was a nice ball. She danced twice with Beavis. Beavis was not obliged to dance. He

preferred looking on. He watched Miss Rigsby, and he saw that she was flattered with the attentions of the Marquess, and that, so far as her cold nature could feel affection, she loved him. Her eyes followed him when he danced with another, with an expression in them much like jealousy. Lucy had been compulsorily relieved of her superintendentship of preparations for, and conduct of the ball, by Lady Elizabeth Eveleigh, who on her arrival took everything upon herself. Lady Elizabeth was full of system, and Lucy was obliged to admit that everything went more smoothly; the servants became more prompt under the rule of Lady Elizabeth than under herself. She would have kept in the background in the ball-room had she been allowed, but she who had thought of others was thought of by them. The Marquess insisted on her dancing with him, then Lady Grace introduced officers to her. Lord Ronald would not be refused her hand in the lancers. Lord Edward, the Archdeacon, did not dance, but he drew Lucy into a window and talked with her for half an hour in an affectionate manner. Whenever Lady Grace passed in her valse, or quadrille, or cotillon, she smiled, and if possible gave her a kindly

word. In spite of her efforts to escape, for she was not in good spirits, Lucy was not allowed to retire. She danced as often as any young girl in the room. Her partners liked her. She was unaffected, full of good sense and modesty. About three o'clock in the morning Beavis told his sister he was going home.

'Papa has the key,' said she. 'Our maid, Emily, is here helping. She and that other, Joanna, could not both come to-morrow, so they arranged between them that one should be here to-night and the other be at the tenants' ball. Papa said she was to go to bed, and that he and you would let yourselves in.'

'I'll get the key,' answered Beavis; 'then I will sit and smoke in the study till our father comes. I do not suppose he will leave yet.'

'Oh dear no! not till the last moment; he enjoys the ball as much as a girl does her first coming out.'

Beavis got the key and walked home.

When he left the house, and was in the park, he turned and looked back at the illuminated mansion; the strains of music came to him faintly through the trees. Then the sense of oppression, which had hung over him all

the evening in the glitter of the ball-room, descended heavily on his spirits.

Was it possible that the Marquess would continue in the same resolution and marry Miss Rigsby? If he did not, then the earthquake would follow, and engulf not only the Kingsbridge family, but his own. As yet Lord Saltcombe had shown no token of wavering. He was too honourable a man to shrink from an engagement when once he had passed his word. On this Beavis assured himself that he could rely. As far as he could see, the marriage would certainly take place. That which troubled him was not the doubt of its accomplishment, but the probable result afterwards. Was there any prospect of happiness to the Marquess in such an union? There was none—none at all. The characters were incompatible. The marriage must lead to mutual estrangement. It would end Saltcombe's friendship for Beavis, whom he would always regard as the evil adviser who had brought him into hateful bonds. Beavis opened his house door noiselessly, and as noiselessly entered the hall. He wore goloshes over his patent leather boots, and his steps were soundless on the kamptulicon floorcloth. To his surprise he saw that the

office door was ajar, and that there was a light within.

He walked down the passage and entered.

He saw the girl Joanna at his father's writing-desk, seated on the stool asleep, her head reposing on her arm upon the desk. A candle was burning beside her. The book-cupboard or press, in which the ledgers were kept, was unlocked and open. The bunch of his father's keys was there, hanging in the lock. On the desk were some of the ledgers, open.

Beavis stepped up to the girl in great surprise, and saw that under her hand was a small account-book, in which, as far as he could see, without removing her hand, was a series of extracts from the ledger; of particulars of rents, payments, incumbrances, neatly written, not in his father's hand.

‘Joanna!’ he called, and laid his hand on her shoulder. Instantly she sprang to her feet, looked at him in a bewildered manner, gathering her senses with difficulty, put her hand firmly on the account-book, and with the other knocked the candle over. It was instantly extinguished on the floor.

‘What is the meaning of this?’ asked Beavis, confronting her in the dark.

‘I beg your pardon, sir,’ answered the girl; ‘I am sorry. I fell asleep whilst sitting up to open when you came home. I thought you might want some hot water and sugar and the whisky. I’m sorry the light has gone out. If you’ll please to excuse me a moment, I will fetch a candle from the kitchen.’

She was fumbling with her hands whilst speaking.

‘What are you about?’ asked Beavis sharply.

‘Please, sir, I can’t find the candle where it has fallen.’

‘Never mind the candle. Go fetch another.’

She slipped away, but not at once, as bidden. Presently she returned, holding a bedroom candle alight. She looked sleepy, her eyes were dull, her hair tangled.

‘Joanna,’ said Beavis, looking at the desk, ‘I must know the meaning of this.’

‘I told you I was sitting up,’ she answered. ‘In the kitchen I might not have heard, and I made so bold as to come in here, where I’d be sure, I thought, to hear when you were at the front door. I’m sorry I was that bold to do so.’

‘What has become of the note-book I saw on the desk a moment ago?’

‘What note-book, sir?’

‘One I saw beneath your hand as you lay asleep.’

Joanna shrugged her shoulders. ‘There are a power of books of all sorts here,’ she answered. ‘Which would you please to want, sir?’

‘I insist on your producing the book.’

‘I have none to produce,’ she answered, stupidly or doggedly.

‘Joanna, how came the cabinet open, and the books about?’

‘I suppose the master left them so.’

‘And the cabinet unlocked?’

She shrugged her shoulders, then yawned. ‘I beg pardon, sir, but I am that sleepy I can neither think nor speak. Do you want some hot water and tumblers, and the sugar, and the whisky?’

‘Go along—to bed at once,’ said Beavis. ‘I’ll inquire into this to-morrow.’

‘And the whisky, and the sugar, and the hot water?’

‘Go along,’ said Beavis stamping. ‘I want nothing but an explanation of your con-

duct, and that I will have from you to-morrow.'

'Yes, sir.' She looked at him. In that quick glance there was neither stupidity nor sleep.

Before he could speak again she had stolen away.

CHAPTER XXV.

WITHOUT WARNING.

BEAVIS remained up, smoking and musing in the study till his father returned. He did not speak to him about Joanna that night, as the old man looked tired. He gave him his candle, made a joke about a midday breakfast and lunch rolled into one, at which they would meet, and retired to rest.

Neither Beavis nor his father came down till late next morning, and then only, over their breakfast, was Joanna's behaviour discussed.

‘I never take tea with meat. What is it this morning? Kidneys? Kidneys above all. No tea, Beavis, coffee for me ; less tannin in it. Can you conceive anything more calculated to give dyspepsia than to immerse meat in a fluid charged with tannin? You convert it at one stroke into leather, and make demands on the

gastric juice which it is not qualified to perform. No, tea is poison; give me coffee.'

'Certainly, my dear father,' said Beavis with a smile. 'I fear I have something to communicate which will disagree with you more than tea.'

'Then reserve it.'

'I must not. We must act upon it at once.'

Mr. Worthivale sighed. 'I enjoyed myself so greatly last night. Indeed, I do not think I have spent such a happy ten days as these last since I was a boy. Well, what is it?'

Then Beavis told his father what he had seen that morning early on his return from Court Royal. Mr. Worthivale was annoyed. 'One cannot get along a week without unpleasantnesses,' he said peevishly. 'Really, at my time of life I expect relief from worries.'

'Where did you leave your keys?'

'I cannot say for certain. Yes, I can. I am positive: that is, I think I locked everything up as usual, and put the keys in my trousers pocket. I generally—I may say always—do so on principle. But yesterday I was in such a hurry about the ball. My time

and thoughts were in such requisition that I may have committed the oversight of leaving them in the bookcase. I was not at the office at all after half-past three, and then I was there for an hour only. There was no money in the drawers.'

'No, but there was information concerning the Duke's affairs worth to some people a good deal of money.'

'It would certainly be annoying if stupid gossip got about concerning the family embarrassments.'

'I do not allude to gossip.'

'I'll tell you what I will do, Beavis. I'll ring for the girl, and then we will examine her together. I see no cause for alarm. She can neither read nor write.'

'Who told you so?'

'A Mrs. Delany, in whose service she was before she came to us. Touch the bell, Beavis.'

In response to the summons Emily appeared.

'Look here,' said the steward; 'send the other girl to me. I mean Joan or Joanna, whichever she is called, I cannot remember. I want a word with her.'

‘Please, sir,’ answered Emily, ‘she is gone.’

‘Gone!’ exclaimed father and son in a breath.

‘Yes, sir. She went by the first coach this morning, when you were asleep. She said as how the young master had given her notice to be off at once. She took her box out into the road herself. She was in a pretty take-on too, sir, because, as she said—to use her very words—she was chiselled out of a dance. She’d set her heart on going to the tenants’ ball to-night. Her and I had a regular breeze because we could not both go, and it ended in the usual way. She got her way, and made me go last night just to look on and help. She was crying with vexation because she could not be at the dance. When she went away she said, What would Lady Grace think, who had been so kind to her, and Miss Lucy, who’d taught her to dance!’

‘I did not give her notice,’ said Beavis in a low tone to his father.

‘She has not had her wage,’ said the steward aloud to Beavis and Emily.

‘Well, now, that is queer,’ began the maid, when the young man cut her short with——

‘You may go.’

As soon as the girl was gone Beavis said, ‘This makes matters more suspicious. I told Joanna that I would examine her with you to-day, and rather than subject herself to interrogation she takes herself off without warning.’

‘She forfeits her wages,’ said Mr. Worthivale. ‘But I dare be bound she misunderstood you. Beavis, you speak rather sharp with servants. I dare say Emily would have talked on for half an hour if you had not cut her over the knuckles so sharp.’

‘I have no doubt whatever she would.’

‘She might have told us a good deal,’ said his father. ‘I have no doubt in my mind that a misapprehension lies at the bottom of this unfortunate affair. Of course, Joan had no right to be in the office, but perhaps she was dusting and tidying. You know yourself how neat she keeps that room, which of old was always in a litter. Once I never knew where to lay my hand on anything. I shall miss her; she had her good points. I dare say you snapped off her head when you came in and found the poor creature dozing over her work. No doubt she was tired. You are too hasty, Beavis, too hasty by far. No question she has

left her address with Emily. I will ring and inquire.'

Beavis stayed his father. 'I am sure she has not. This is a more serious matter than you suppose. I never liked the looks of the girl; she was too clever.'

'That comes of education; the over-education of this nineteenth century.'

'But she can neither read nor write.'

'Oh! I beg your pardon. I mean the reverse. She is clever because not overtaxed by Board School masters straining poor, underfed brains to reach standards that are far above their level.'

'Whence did she come?'

'From Plymouth, from Colonel Delany's—a very respectable family. He is connected by marriage with the Pomeroy's. I do not know who Mrs. Delany was, but of course she is a lady, and she wrote in highest commendation of the girl.'

'Let me see the letter.'

'It is somewhere in the office; I think I can find it; follow me. But mind, Beavis,' said the steward, stopping at the door, and holding up his finger; 'remember what I have said about drinking tea with meat. You de-

liberately tan your food, and yet you expect to digest it. As well eat sole-leather.'

The old man fumbled in his drawers.

'I thought I had put it in this pigeon-hole, among sundries. It seems to have made itself wings and gone.'

'I have little doubt Joanna has taken it.'

'She could not read or write,' said Mr. Worthivale.

'If she does not read, why did she pull out the ledgers? If she does not write, who made a précis of the debts and income of the family in the little note-book I saw?'

'It may have been in my handwriting. I often take odd scraps of paper and figure on them the revenue of the Kingsbridge estates, and the outgoings, and try to extract some comfort from them. I dare say you will find a score of such balances in the waste-paper basket.'

'They ought not to be there.'

'Who is the wiser? I put initials to the debts.'

'What I saw was not in your handwriting, and was done very clearly and systematically. It was done by some one experienced in book-

keeping—that is the only point that shakes my conviction that the girl has bled your books.’

‘What was the back of the account-book like?’

‘I did not see it. Joanna knocked the candle over, as I am convinced, deliberately, and in the dark secreted the notes and put away the ledgers. I heard her do the latter, and when she returned with the candle, everything was in place, and the account-book nowhere that I could see.’

‘We will overhaul the cabinet.’

‘I should like to overhaul her room.’

‘I will call Emily.’

The maid conducted Beavis upstairs.

He looked round. The bed had not been slept in. Some scraps of paper lay scattered on the floor; a saucer with water in it stood in the window.

‘Ah!’ said Emily, ‘never was nobody so stuck up as Joanna over nothing as she was over the pot of lily of the valley her ladyship gave her. She went off on the top of the coach, hugging it like a baby, and I seed her kiss her hand and wave it, right away over the woods towards Court Royal; and she was crying. I

reckon she was sorry to go. She was so taken with Lady Grace, she nigh worshipped the ground she trod on; and the last thing I heard her say was, "Oh, what will Lady Grace think!" Why, sir, I reckon her ladyship won't cast a thought after her.'

Beavis shook his head.

'Joanna has not left a pin that was her own. She looked about the room a score of times to make sure she had everything. She carried away her pink silk as she minded to have worn at the tenants' ball, had it not been spoiled with mineral water.'

'Did she give you her address?'

'No, sir, her and me wasn't over-good friends. She was one that would have all her own way, she was that over-bearing. I did think it was not fair that she should go to the dance to-night and not I, who am the longest in the place, but she was that set on it, I reckon there was no withstanding her. Lady Grace and Miss Lucy had taught her to dance for the purpose—she brought this up on me, and what was I to say?'

'That will do,' said Beavis. 'I asked a simple question and required a simple answer.'

'And after all, sir,' said the unabashed

Emily, 'she won't go to the ball neither. That's sweet comfort.'

The tenants' ball began at seven, and by tacit understanding was to be over at two in the morning. The hours were very much earlier than at the grand ball of the evening before. Mr. Worthivale and Beavis were there, as a matter of course, and all the ducal family appeared. His Grace remained in the ball-room longer than on the former occasion, talking to the young farmers' sons and daughters, showing that he knew them all by name, took an interest in their welfare, and was delighted to have them about him enjoying themselves. He was obstinate on this evening, he would not go when his daughter thought advisable.

'No, dear,' he said, 'it refreshes me to see all their happy faces. How hearty they are; how well they behave; they are so courteous and kindly! I do like our English peasantry; there is a gentility of feeling about them I meet with nowhere else—good hearts and clear heads.'

The Duke knew nearly everyone. He had the happy faculty of never forgetting a face, and of remembering the circumstances of every

family. He had the tact of inquiring after absent members, by name, with such real or well-simulated interest, as to gratify those he addressed, and convince them of his sincerity and friendship.

‘What! Mrs. Prowse! You here? This is an unexpected pleasure. How many years ago was it that you were pretty Mary Eastlake, with whom I opened the ball? The belle of Aveton Gifford.’

‘Well, your Grace, my daughter has come for her first dance, and as I’ve no other children—you’ll excuse me, your Grace—I thought I’d come with her and see her safe home.’

‘Bring her to me. If she is like you in old days, she will kill many hearts this evening.’

‘Well, Richard Palmer! I hope you have brought your voice and will favour us with a song, when the dancers give over for a moment. How is poor Jane? Is she still suffering from her spine? I was so grieved to hear of her accident—I had counted on her presence this evening.’

‘How are you, Mr. Newberry? Last time I saw you, your wife was bent on the great ash being cut down in front of the gate. It went

to my heart to deny her, the tree was so fine, but I learnt a lesson; the gale of last October tore the tree to pieces and pelted your roof with the boughs.'

'Broke the roof through and through, your Grace.'

'That is a lesson never to deny the ladies anything; I dare say your own experience teaches you the same.'

'How do you do, Mr. Nesbitt?' to a school-master; 'glad I secured your services for the new school at Wooley. I read your account of your misadventures—that you sent to *Blackwood*—with great amusement. Never laughed so much in my life. It was smartly written—very. You will do something with your pen some day.'

'Oh, Lucy, dear,' said Lady Grace, 'do go to papa and persuade him to retire. He is so happy when he gets with the young people that he will stay on here longer than is judicious. He will suffer for it to-morrow, and I am sure that they will dance with more ease when the restraint of his presence is removed. Look! there are only three circling round the room now, to the strains of the whole marine band, and they are blushing and disposed to give it

up. Where is Joanna? What has become of that odd girl? I see her nowhere.'

'I do not know; I will ask my father, or Beavis.'

'Do, Lucy, go to the Duke. He will listen to you when he will not obey me or Uncle Ronald—not even the Archdeacon. You have such a coaxing way, and yet you are so resolute, he will not refuse to go. Dear old man! it is always "Where is Lucy?" with him. Nothing goes right unless under your hands.'

Then Lady Grace caught the eye of Beavis, and beckoned him to her. 'Where is your maid Joanna?' she asked. 'Do see how shy the young folk are. These couples are only dancing because I have set them spinning, and they do it out of duty, not because they enjoy themselves. Joanna has no shyness, I will get her a partner and set her off.'

'She is not here, Lady Grace.'

'Not here! But how is this? Could you not spare her? I am sorry; Lucy and I have been teaching her to dance, and she had so set her heart on this evening.'

'She is a perplexing, queer girl.'

'She is a girl worth studying, a girl from whom a great deal may be learnt; delightfully

fresh and yet terribly worn out, if you can understand such a compound of opposites. Is not that the sum of Hegel's philosophy, the conciliation of antagonisms? Well, that is Joanna. I am so sorry she is not here. I should have delighted to see how she profited by my teaching.'

'She is gone, Lady Grace.'

'Gone!'

'Yes, gone without warning.'

CHAPTER XXVI.

UNSTABLE AS WATER.

THREE days after the grand ball the Rigsbys left. Miss Rigsby had not appeared at the tenants' ball; she was tired, and did not feel well. The rumour of the projected marriage had got about, and the tenants would have liked to have seen their future Duchess, but she was ungracious; she disliked vulgar people and would not appear, to the disappointment of the tenants and of the Duke, who thought that, in this matter, she did not act with the consideration proper to her position.

The Marquess and she had seen a good deal of each other, and everything seemed favourable to a marriage. Mr. Rigsby held long conferences with the Duke, and came away greatly impressed with his urbanity, and still more impressed with the conviction that he had made his own wisdom and importance clear to the

Duke. Miss Rigsby had convinced herself that she was in love with the Marquess. Miss Stokes assured her of the passion that consumed the bosom of her lover. Lord Saltcombe did not in any way vary in his behaviour; always courteous and considerate, ready to be with her on every occasion, conversing on her reminiscences of Ceylon, and attracting her attention to what was interesting in the country that was shortly to be her home. She had no appreciation of what was good in art, and he amused himself and her in endeavouring to instil into her some of the first principles of taste.

The day after the departure of the Rigsbys, Beavis went to his friend's rooms. He found the Marquess in his arm-chair among a heap of papers that he had torn up and cast about him on the floor. He was so deep in his thoughts, which were of a painful nature, that he did not notice the entrance of Beavis. At his first word he started and sprang up bewildered, unable at once to recognise the speaker.

‘You are, I hear, going to Plymouth, Saltcombe?’

‘I—Plymouth!—oh yes, I forgot. To be sure, yes, Beavis, I am going there for a while. How hot it is in the room!’

The Marquess went to the window and threw it open, drew a long breath, passed his red silk handkerchief over his brow, and then returning to his chair, said, 'Oh, Beavis! you have no conception of the strain on one's powers to keep up the appearance of being a lover.'

'Good heavens!' exclaimed Beavis; 'speak lower, or say nothing on the matter.'

'I must speak. I have no one but yourself to whom I can give vent to my feelings. This is your doing; you have put me on the rack.'

'I have advised for the best.'

'I know you have,' answered the Marquess with a bitter laugh. 'I will go through with it now, my honour is engaged, so do not fear. *Tout est pour le mieux dans le meilleur des mondes*. You must excuse me if, at times, my courage gives way.'

Beavis had never before seen Lord Saltcombe so excited. He was usually composed and cool.

'The Duke wants a word with you,' said Beavis. 'I have come to tell you that he wishes to speak to you in the rose boudoir.'

The Marquess nodded. 'One moment, Beavis, before I go.'

‘I am at your service.’

‘Tell me, how is it that we are spending money right and left just now, and that there is not the ever-recurring worry of a deficit?’

Beavis hesitated.

‘I insist on knowing,’ said Lord Saltcombe.

‘The necessary sums have been lent.’

‘What! a fresh loan to crush us! At what rate of interest now? Who is the lender? Another Jew?’

‘No Jew,’ answered Beavis. ‘No interest is asked, as all will be repaid as soon as your marriage takes place.’

‘Who is the Good Samaritan that has flown to the rescue?’

‘There is nothing of the Good Samaritan in this. It is but a temporary accommodation.’

‘But who is this most accommodating party?’

‘My father.’

The Marquess stood still and looked at Beavis. He put his hand to his chin; it shook. ‘Good God!’ he exclaimed. ‘You—you dear good friends! You again helping us!’ He was greatly moved. He took Beavis’ hand and held it tightly in his whilst he looked out of the window. ‘Oh, Beavis! how kind, how noble

you are ! I insist on the whole truth. What is the sum advanced ? ’

‘ Four thousand. ’

‘ Is that your father’s money ? ’

‘ No. ’

‘ Whose is it then ? ’

Beavis did not reply. He looked down.

‘ I insist on being told. ’

‘ Lucy’s. ’

‘ What ! ’ exclaimed the Marquess colouring ; ‘ indebted to dear Lucy more deeply still. Oh, Beavis ! never, never, can we repay the debt we owe to your house. So Lucy finds the money to wreath the ox for the sacrifice. ’ He was silent, he let go his friend’s hand and stood before the fire, looking down and kicking the hearth. ‘ It shall all be repaid, ’ he said at last ; ‘ I mean the money. The good intent, the self-sacrifice, that can only be treasured in our hearts, a priceless possession. Beavis, do not fear. The marriage will take place, and that speedily. I cannot bear to be indebted so deeply to you. ’

‘ Your father is awaiting you, ’ said Beavis, anxious to cut short a scene painful to both.

The Marquess left the room, and sought his father.

The Duke led a very regular life, regulated to the smallest details. He suffered from sleeplessness, and therefore did not rise till late. He breakfasted at half-past ten, after which he was visited by his son and daughter, and occasionally by Lord Ronald. The General was up at half-past six, and took a constitutional till eight, when he came in and had a cup of coffee. He breakfasted with the rest at nine. The Duke read his letters whilst dressing, and arranged them in three piles; those he must himself reply to, those that might be answered by his daughter or son, and those on business, which he passed over to the steward. Mr. Worthivale called daily—or almost daily—at noon, and sat with him for an hour. The Duke partook of a light luncheon at half-past one, and when the weather permitted he took a drive: if the weather was unfavourable he walked in his conservatories.

He generally dined with the family, and sat with them for a couple of hours after dinner. Then he retired for the night. On Sundays he breakfasted half an hour earlier, in order that he might attend church.

Sometimes after dinner he took a hand at

whist, or played chess with the Vicar, who was frequently invited to Court Royal. In former years he had spent the season in town, but his health no longer permitted his travelling by rail, and his children had accommodated themselves to a country life.

The Duke had pretended to pass over the care of the property to his son, and he no longer inquired into the balance; that the Marquess was expected to see to; but he amused himself with details, the complaints of the farmers, their demands for fresh buildings, their applications for drainage operations. These he took up, and it gave a zest to his drives to inspect the farms and see the proposed improvements. This was a little vexatious to the steward, who endeavoured to cut down expenses. The tenants knew that they were sure of a favourable answer from his Grace, and therefore applied direct to him.

The Duke had his private account at the bank; a modest sum of a thousand pounds was always paid in to this account, on which he drew independently of the house. The cost of keeping up Court Royal, the wages, the housekeeping, the gardens, belonged to a separate account, with which he did not

concern himself. That was under the control of Lucy and her father; subject, of course, to Lady Grace, if she chose to supervise it, but this she never did.

The general accounts, the rent roll, the receipts, the outlay on the estates, the charges on the property, the interest on the mortgages and loans, these the Marquess was supposed to examine every half-year; but he did so in a careless, impatient manner, and refused to take an interest in the property. Time enough, he thought, when forced to do so, on his succession to the estates.

‘Sit down, Herbert,’ said the Duke, when Lord Saltcombe entered. ‘We must have a little quiet conversation together. You are going to Plymouth; it is well, you must be with your *fiancée* as much as you can to learn each other’s characters and habits. I confess to a little surprise. I had thought you would have been guided in your choice less by caprice. Still—you are the judge of what is best for yourself. In the matter of fortune everything is satisfactory, and perhaps that is not a point to be disregarded, as our fortunes are not exactly what they were. The property was heavily burdened when it came to me;

still, I have lived very quietly of late, and a margin must be left to turn over and extinguish such debts as were formerly contracted.'

The Marquess looked down.

'You have been shut out from the world for some years, Herbert. That has not met with my approval. Your place was in London, and you ought to have been in Parliament. Now that you are about to be married I expect you will take your proper position in the social and political constellations. I hope this union is one of genuine affection.'

'I trust it meets with your approval.'

'I have nothing against it. The young lady has been properly educated, the family is respectable. The Rigsbys of Lincolnshire are known; they have been settled in that most dismal of counties for several centuries. They have a baronet in the family—a late creation. Well, in these days one must not be too nice.' After a pause, the Duke went on: 'You are quite right to go to Plymouth. I wish you there to take a good suite of rooms in the Royal Hotel, and live up to your station. Take some of your own servants with you; your valet, and your own riding and driving horses, and your groom. I should advise a dog-cart

and a drag. I am not one to encourage extravagance, indeed I hate display, it is vulgar; but your position demands a certain amount of appearance. You are the representative of the House, now that I am a poor broken creature, and cannot show in public. An Eveleigh must always maintain his dignity. I beg you to remember this. Never let yourself down.'

Lord Saltcombe, not knowing what answer to make, bowed. His father accepted this movement as a sign of submission to his will.

'One thing more. I believe you have not as yet made your *fiancée* a present. This, of course, you must do. I have looked through the family jewels, but see nothing that quite answers the purpose. I should like you to spare no expense; run up to town and choose out a suitable present, a diamond necklet or tiara. It is possible you may not have the sum sufficient at your command. I have therefore drawn you a blank cheque on my private account. Fill in the sum when you know what you want.'

'I cannot—my father.'

'You must, Herbert. It is my desire. I shall be annoyed if you give your betrothed a present unworthy of a future Duchess of Kingsbridge.'

Lord Saltcombe was too agitated to speak.

‘Herbert,’ continued the old Duke, ‘I give my full consent to this union, and I ask the Almighty on my knees to shower His richest blessing upon it. May you be happy as I was happy with your dear, never-to-be-forgotten mother. You deserve it. A blessing is attached to filial obedience, and you have always been a dutiful and loving son ; you have never caused me an hour’s pain, never given me occasion to blush to think that a son of mine has stained the hereditary honour.’

Lord Saltcombe returned to his apartments in a condition of confusion and distress that made him thankful Beavis was not there to see him. He threw himself in his chair, covered his face with his hands, and a sob broke from his bosom and relieved the immediate tension.

He sat thus thinking, hiding his face from no one, for he was alone, for a quarter of an hour. Then, as though fired by a sudden resolution, he took a key from his pocket and opened his cabinet. He drew forth a drawer and took from it a bundle of faded letters. He set his lips closely, and his brows were contracted.

The fire was low. He took the tongs and

raked it together, and put on a billet of wood. Then, to brisk it up, cast on it the scraps of paper from the floor. Now the fire flamed, and the dry wood caught and crackled.

Lord Saltcombe leaned back in his chair, and untied the bundle of letters. He drew the notes from their envelopes, and looked at one, then another. His face relaxed ; an expression of pain of a different sort settled on it. He made an effort to recover his firmness and to carry out his resolution. He threw one, two, three envelopes on the flames, and sighed as they flared. He knelt down, and placed the letters on the hearth. Then he drew from the cabinet the little miniature already described, and looked at it long, with face that twitched with suffering. He put it towards his lips—as about to kiss it, then recovered himself, and placed it on the little pyre of old letters.

‘They must all go together now,’ he said, and put his hand to the billet of wood to bring it to the little pile. But the wood was hot and burnt his fingers. Then he took the tongs, and picked up a coal, and laid it on one of the papers. The coal died out, and Lord Saltcombe took the paper, and brushed away the charred fragments. He struck a vesta match,

but his hand trembled and he was unable to fire with it the old letters.

Then he stood up, and leaning his elbow on the chimney-piece, rested his head against his hand, and looked down on the miniature on the hearth. How lovely that face was! The great dark eyes seemed to plead for pity. 'Why should I?' asked the Marquess. 'It must be done before I am married. Then I must utterly destroy all memories of the past—but not yet! surely not yet!' He stooped, picked up the miniature, tied the letters together again, and replaced them and the picture in their old drawer.

The resolution of Lord Saltcombe had led him to burn three envelopes.

CHAPTER XXVII.

REVOLT.

MR. LAZARUS was engaged on his dinner. He sat on the chair without a bottom, with a plate on his knees. In that plate were three cold Jerusalem artichokes. He had a fourth on the end of an iron fork, and he held it between his eye and the window. 'It is deadly grey in flesh,' he said, 'and sits cold on the stomick. I wish Joanna were back to warm my victuals. It is not the quality I object to, it's the coldness. There is a sort of damp chill about these cold artichokes, like grey November fog solidified into vegetable pills. Joanna is a long time about her business. I know what it is—the great dinners she gets there, goose and sage stuffing, roast beef and Yorkshire pudding, the beef with little white curls of horse-radish on it, like the first locks on the head of an innocent babe, that a mother loves to play with. One

of the first things that ever I can remember, when I turn my eyes lovingly back upon childhood, is tapioca pudding ; how delicious it was, golden on top like cream, and browned here and there, made with good milk and an egg. There is a deal of difference between the tapioca now and what it was then. Now best Rio is eightpence-halfpenny, Penang is fivepence ; then it cost me nothing. Those childish days were lovely. I paid for nothing, I consumed everything gratis. They will never return, never ! I wish Joanna were back ; I can't stomach these artichokes. I'd make her eat them, it is a sin to waste them, and I'd get myself a cheesecake.' The door was thrown open, and Joanna appeared, thrusting her box before her with one hand and both knees, whilst with the left hand she clasped a flower-pot.

'There !' said she, 'I'm back, Mr. Lazarus. The man outside is waiting to be paid for carrying my box. He wants a shilling, but he can be forced to be content with ninepence if you refuse to give more. I want some dinner.'

'Here, take it,' said Lazarus, handing her the plate ; 'do as you always have done—tear the very food from my mouth. You long-

necked cormorant ! You've done growing and ought to be ashamed of yourself.'

'The porter is waiting to be paid,' said Joanna.

'I suppose eightpence and a French sou will do, if I slip it among the English coppers. Take this; you shall get no more. With a little effort you might have carried the box yourself.'

An altercation was heard outside when the girl offered the porter the eightpence and sou. Lazarus put his hands in his pockets and listened with composure. To put his hands in his pockets he was forced to stand up; then he sat down in the bottomless chair, and clenched them in the position where he had thrust them. Not another halfpenny would he give, but if the porter were inclined to deal, that was another matter.

Joanna returned triumphant. 'He went away cursing all Jews,' she said.

'Let him curse,' answered Lazarus; 'that relieves temper and don't hurt. There are your victuals, Joanna. I hope you've not been so pampered as to have your stomach spoiled. I suppose geese have been as thick as quails in Kibroth-hataavah. I don't like goose, it is

greasy food. Mutton, boiled, with caper sauce, roast with currant jelly—bah! you are puffy about the face, laying on fat in flakes. Tapioca, I suppose, every day, gorging yourself on it—guzzling greengage trifle, making a beast of yourself on meringues. I had a meringue once, the day I was married, that ended in gall and bitterness. I don't mean the meringue, I mean the marriage. The meringue cost me fourpence.'

Joanna took the plate of cold artichokes, turned them contemptuously over, and ate them.

'I'll tell you what it is, master,' she said; 'I've toiled and lied for you, and done a deal of dirty work. I've done dirty work here, mending old clothes, and patching and darning carpets, but the dirtiest work you ever set me to do is what I have done at Court Royal. What has come of it all? I am cheated out of two dances. You sent me there, just when I was about to get a little amusement and learn dancing, and when I got there, and did learn, you gave me work to do that forced me to run away and miss the tenants' ball. It is not fair.'

'Run away!' echoed Lazarus. 'You haven't run away, and not done what you

was sent after? You can't have been so wicked?'

'I've done it,' said Joanna, 'and truly ashamed of myself I am. I tell you what it is, Mr. Lazarus, unless I was pawned to you and couldn't do otherwise, I'd strike. But you know you've got me, and can drive me where you will. I give you fair warning, I'll kill myself rather than do more of that sort of dirty work; then you may whistle for your half a sovereign, and the interest—seven shillings. I reckon you'll be careful not to drive me to extremities, lest you are left seventeen shillings to the bad.' Joanna looked round the kitchen. 'What a proper mess you've got everything into whilst I have been away! It is a piggery. No wonder Moses forbade you eating swine's flesh, it would be sheer cannibalism. Everything was bad before, but it is bad and rusty and dirty now. I will not have it. Take yourself out of that seatless chair; you're sinking through it so low that in another minute you'll be sitting on the floor. Get out; I'll bring you down a sound chair from upstairs.'

'The chair is good, Joanna, it only wants the oven tray across it.'

'I will not have it here. I have been in

kitchens that were a pleasure to live in. There every bit of wood was white, and every bit of metal shone. I could have been happy there, but for what you'd set me at, and that took the pleasure out of everything. Look at that window-pane, cracked where the boys threw a stone eighteen months ago. A dab of putty holds it together, and stops the hole where the stone went through. It must be mended. I will not bear it left like this.'

'Go along, Joanna ; now you have glutted your appetite, go and get on your old clothes. Those you have on are too good for this shop.'

'No—I will not put on such mean, miserable rags again. I have worn what are neat and clean, and neat and clean I shall dress henceforth. Unless I have my own way, I won't light the fire and boil the kettle, I won't peel the potatoes, nor turn uniforms, nor sell anything. I'll lie in bed, and you won't get me out except with dynamite.'

'You've been spoiled,' said the pawnbroker. 'Oh, the wickedness of the world ! I had you here, sheltered under my wing from every harm, and when I send you out a little way, you become a prey to all kinds of vice and corruption of morals. You're too grand now to do any-

thing. Why wasn't you a Jewess born, and then nothing you went through would have taken the love of economy out of you ! I suppose you've seen such grand things that nothing here seems good. Perhaps you'd like plate glass in the kitchen window, and a silver stew-pan for the potatoes, and an eider-down petticoat, and a dado round the walls of the scullery !'

'He who has seen the sea doesn't call every puddle a lake,' said Joanna. 'I'd rather live in one of the Duke's cottages with deal tables and clean plates than among your valuables, allowed only to use what is worthless. No, master,' added Joanna, looking round, 'it has done me good to go away. I've seen a bit of a new world, and I'm wiser than I was. You can't get a shirt off a naked man, nor feathers off a toad, so I do not expect of you to let me have everything new and bright, but I will have things sound and clean.'

'Whither are you going now ?' he asked, as she made a movement towards the stairs.

'I am going after my flowers,' she answered ; 'I want to see how they are. I've thought of them and longed to see them again, and they are about the only things here I have cared to

see once more. I'll tell you another thing. Get the sack of shavings from under the counter, and empty it in the cupboard under the stairs, where I keep my kindling. I'll sleep in the shop no more. I'll have a proper bed and a room to myself. I am eighteen; in another year mother will redeem me; if not, I shall redeem myself, my own way.' Then she ascended the stairs.

Lazarus struggled out of his chair. Having his hands in his pockets, and sinking deeper through the place where the seat had been, he was nipped, and could not extricate himself with ease. He shook his head, and, when his hands were free, withdrew them from his pockets, and rubbed his frowsy chin. 'What democratic ideas are afloat!' he said. 'What will the world come to?'

Then he seated himself on the flour-barrel. 'She'll be too proud to occupy this place of honour,' said he, 'where she's squatted time out of mind. I made a sad mistake plunging her in the whirlpool; now, she'll never be to me what she was—she'll be exacting in her food, for one thing. That reminds me, I have not had my dinner. I'll go and get something at the shop over the way.'

When Joanna came down, to her surprise she saw that the Jew had put a beefsteak pie and a plate of cheesecakes on the table, as well as a jug of porter. He had been across the street, and procured these delicacies. After a struggle with himself, he made the purchases, both because he was hungry himself, and because he was afraid of losing Joanna's services unless he treated her better. The contrast between her life at Court Royal lodge and the Golden Balls, Barbican, was too dreadful not to shock her; he resolved to bridge the chasm with beefsteak pie and cheesecakes.

‘There, there, my child,’ he said; ‘you see how I love you, and how glad I am to have you home. If you had given me earlier notice I would have had better fare ready for you; as it is, I have run out and spared no expense to provide you with dainties. Sit down, bring a chair from upstairs—two, one for me, I can endure that bottomless affair no longer, and tell me what of my business you have done at Court Royal.’

Joanna was mollified by what she saw. ‘I thank you,’ she said; ‘you have watered my plants whilst I have been away. I thank you.’

‘Don’t mention it,’ answered the Jew; ‘the water cost nothing. What have you ascertained?’

‘Here is the account,’ said the girl, extending to him the note-book Beavis had observed under her hand in the office. ‘I was caught taking my extracts, and I got away with difficulty. I lost my dance by it.’

The Jew clutched the book eagerly.

‘To-night,’ she said, ‘was the tenants’ ball, and I was to have been there. Lady Grace and Miss Lucy taught me to dance, and I should have been happy—but I was caught over the accounts and had to make off.’

The Jew was immersed in the accounts. He chuckled and rubbed his knees.

‘Past all recovery,’ he said, and laughed.

‘I do not know that,’ said Joanna, helping herself to some pie. ‘The Marquess is going to marry an heiress, tremendously wealthy, and that will set the property afloat again.’

‘What—what is that?’ exclaimed the Jew, starting up with almost a scream.

‘There is a leathery coffee-planter come home from Ceylon with a pale daughter. Their name is Rigsby. A match has been made up between the Marquess of Saltcombe and Miss

Rigsby. I don't suppose he cares much for her; but she is worth a vast sum of money, and the steward, Mr. Worthivale, calculates to clear the property with her fortune. If you've got some of the mortgages, it is all right. You'll have the money.'

'I do not want the money. I will not be paid off!' cried the Jew, dashing his hands against his forehead.

Joanna took some more beefsteak pie. 'That is the first time I have heard you decline money,' she said dryly. 'What do you want? Not the property? Not to be a great landlord? Not to pig in Court Royal?'

'I will refuse the money. I will keep my grip on them.'

Joanna poured herself out some stout.

'If they choose to clear you off they can. I believe it is Mr. Worthivale's intention to do so immediately after the marriage has taken place,' she said.

'Who are these Rigsbys? Where are they?'

'I have told you what Mr. Rigsby is. They have taken a house in Plymouth or Stoke. They have taken a house there for the winter.'

‘Do they know the state of affairs?’

‘I cannot tell. I have not talked with them. I have found out a great deal. You cannot expect me to see into people’s heads as if they were water-bottles. It is only cheap-jacks who expose all their contents to the public.’

‘Is this Rigsby a fool to sink his fortune in redeeming land which is daily depreciating in value?’

‘I do not think he is a fool. He does not look like it.’

‘Joanna! this spoils all my schemes. I have toiled and spun to get my web round them; and now are they to escape me? I could knock my brains out against the wall to think it.’

‘Why should you wish the family harm? They are good people, a long way above such goodness as you or I could aspire to. They are loved and respected by all who know them. They hurt no one and bless many. I am glad that there is a chance of their recovery.’

‘I do not care for my money. I want to have them down, down under my feet.’

‘ Then I will help you no more. What harm have they done you? ’

‘ The worst, the deadliest harm of all. ’

‘ And you are moving against them out of personal revenge? I thought all you wanted was to be sure of your money. ’

‘ I will tell you all—then you may judge if I have cause to love them ; if I desire to spare them. ’

Joanna laid aside her knife and fork ; she was interested now, and alarmed. She was afraid to think that she had been working for the downfall of that dear Lady Grace whom she regarded above every mortal being.

‘ As you say, you are no longer a child. You are a woman, so you can hear the whole story. I was married eight years ago to Rachel ; she was seventeen, and beautiful. She was very fond of theatrical performances ; her mother had been on the stage, and it ran in the blood. Our people, leastways our Jewish girls, take to the stage as ducks to water, and as Jewish men to business. I married her on that day I spoke of, when I ate a meringue that cost fourpence. At that time the Marquess of Saltcombe was in the army, and with his regiment at Plymouth. He and some other officers got up

amateur theatricals, for some charitable purpose nominally, really for their own entertainment. There was difficulty about filling the ladies' parts. They tried a professional, but she was not good-looking enough, or a stick, I do not recollect which, and so my wife was asked to assist. I objected, and we had a quarrel. She was headstrong and took her own way. We did not run smoothly together. It was with us broad and narrow gauge running over the same line ; constant hitches, nothing to time, an occasional smash, and then a block. I suppose the performances went off to general satisfaction. I believe a hundred pounds were cleared for the charitable institution, but that did not concern me. What did concern me was the conduct of my wife ; she got more estranged from me than before, and the end was she left me and went abroad with the Marquess.'

'Did you go after her?' asked Joanna.

'Not I. They went to the Island of Sicily—to Palermo. It would not have cost me a halfpenny less than fifty pounds to have gone in pursuit. My business would have suffered. In the time I would have been absent I might have turned over three hundred pounds. Be-

sides, what was the good? I couldn't take her back. Was not that a dreadful thing, Joanna?'

'I am not surprised at anyone running away from you. I suppose you fed her on cold artichokes, and made her drink Ems water.'

'I did not,' said Lazarus angrily. 'I treated her as I ought. I know my duty. A queen is a queen; a pawn is a pawn.'

'Go on with your story,' said the girl. 'What happened after that?'

'To me?'

'I know without your telling me what happened to you. You settled deeper into dirt and drudgery.'

'As for her and the Marquess,' Lazarus continued, 'they were soon separated. His uncle, the Lord Ronald Eveleigh, went out after them as hard as he could. What took place between them I do not know; but I know the end was that the Marquess returned to England, left the army, and settled at Court Royal. What became of Rachel I never heard. She took care not to communicate with me, and I did not trouble myself to inquire after her. Whether she is on the stage or at the bottom of the sea is one to me. We have not met since, but I have a sort of idea she has

taken to the theatre as her profession. It suited her tastes; she was fond of dress and display and excitement, and was vain of her beauty. The Golden Balls did not agree with her; the Barbican, and the smell of Sutton Pool, and the life in a shop were all distasteful; besides, she never took keenly to me.'

'Did you love her very much?'

'Of course I did. She was young and beautiful, and I had never cared for any woman before. We might have been so happy,' sighed the Jew, 'and had a family to attend to the business; a girl to mind the kitchen, another to turn the old coats; and a boy would have been mighty useful to me in the shop and at my office up in town.'

'Do you love her still?'

'I know this: I hate the Marquess mortally,' he said. 'He has spoiled my life, he has taken from me my wife, has made a home to be no home at all, and has robbed me of every hope in the future.'

'But why do you try to drag down those who have never offended you—the Duke, and Lady Grace, and Lord Ronald?'

'I cannot touch him apart from them. They are all tied in one bundle, and must go

together. You can see that, I suppose, by the light of reason.'

Joanna was silent.

Then the Jew looked round at the table and growled. 'A precious big hole you've eaten in the beefsteak pie, and gobbled up three quarters of the cheesecakes. I hope you are satisfied at last, eh?'

'No, I am not.'

'What more do you want, next?' he asked sneeringly.

'I want to go to a dance, and till I have been at a ball I shall not be satisfied—there.'

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A PLAYBILL.

MR. LAZARUS left the house in the afternoon, and Joanna was alone. She at once set to work to make the kitchen tidy. She scoured the grease and rust from the pans, she washed the table, she sandpapered the fire-irons, she carried all the broken crockery to the ash-heap and smashed it up there, then replaced the pieces with sound articles from the stores above. She knew where there was a glazier's diamond, with it she cut a pane, she made her own putty, and reglazed the broken window.

Then she went upstairs to an attic room, with a pail of water, soap, and a scrubbing-brush, and washed the floor. She took up, piece by piece, a small iron bed, and put it together in the room ; she fitted it with mattress, blankets, sheets, and coverlet. She dragged up a washhand-stand, and hung a looking-glass

against the wall. She carried up a chair and a towel-horse, and then looked round with triumph. She had made for herself a very decent bedroom. One article of furniture was wanting—a chest of drawers. This she did not convey to her room, partly because she had nothing of her own to put in the drawers, and partly because it was too heavy for her to move unassisted. In the window she set her precious pot of lilies of the valley.

Then, tired with her journey and exertion, she seated herself on the bed, rested her head in both hands, and her elbows on her knees, and gave way to tears.

The contrast between the cleanliness and comfort of the lodge and the dirt and disorder of the Golden Balls was too great not to make itself felt. She had gone on in one weary round of drudgery before because she knew of nothing different; now she had seen a better mode of life, and the old was insupportable; a return to it, unaltered, impossible. This she let Lazarus understand. She would work for him as hard as before, but she would insist on being treated properly.

But her own condition was not that which disturbed Joanna; that which troubled her was

the knowledge that she had been made use of by her master to work mischief against a family she had learned to respect. Of the Duke, indeed, she knew little, except what she had heard, but that had impressed her more than she acknowledged to herself. His greatness, the deference with which all regarded him—the way in which he was looked to as the source of all benefits, as the one who was the mainstay of the social order, as the one to whom, in cases of dispute, the ultimate appeal lay—this had formed an atmosphere of public opinion which she had inhaled, and which had nourished in her respect. She had seen little of Lord Ronald, but she had heard him spoken of as a man of strict integrity and perfect guilelessness. She had seen and spoken with the Marquess. Her box was unpacked. On the chimney-piece stood the canary yellow Dresden cup and saucer he had given her. Once he had come to his sister's room whilst she was having a dancing lesson, had recognised and spoken kindly to her. She could not feel towards him other than friendly regard.

‘As for running away with Rachel,’ she mused, ‘I dare swear Rachel wanted to be run away with. If I had been the wife of Lazarus

I'd have done the same, have run with him to Palermo or Hong Kong—anywhere to be rid of Lazarus and the Barbican. To be married and to be pawned are two totally different cases,' argued the girl. 'To be married one gives consent, and if the situation don't suit, you leave it; but pawned is another matter—mother did that, and I can't run away. She must come with the ticket and release me. One would be wickedness, the other would not.'

Lady Grace she knew and loved as she loved no one else. She was miserable at the thought that she had been acting towards her with ingratitude, that Lady Grace might be able with justice one day to reproach her for having ill-repaid the kindness shown her. What would Lady Grace think of her now—of the way in which she had left her situation? Would she be told that she was detected at the account books? Joanna's bosom heaved, her face was crimson, her cheeks stained with tears. She could not, she would not, leave the dear, good lady troubled with thoughts that she was ungrateful.

Joanna stood up, washed her face, and went downstairs. She entered the shop, and looked about for a little wooden box. When she had

found one to her mind, she lined it with cotton-wool, and placed in it her necklace of Roman pearls. Then she wrote a letter in what she knew was servant-maid English, which she folded and fastened up in the box with the pearls. This was the letter :

‘ For dear Lady Grace,—This is a present from her devoted, loving, faithful servant, Joanna. Joanna knows very well that it is not worthy of her acceptance (it cost only 2*l.* 18*s.* 6*d.* second-hand), but nevertheless she hopes Lady Grace Eveleigh will condescend to accept it, as Joanna has nothing in the world else except what she stands up in, and the pink silk dress which is spoiled. Joanna takes this opportunity of informing your ladyship that I didn’t run away from my place, nor misbehave myself any way, but was summoned home on *urgent business*. Joanna will never, never, never forget and cease to love dear, sweet Lady Grace, and she begs to inform her ladyship that I value my pot of lily of the valley above every treasure the world contains.’

The girl’s mind was relieved when she had written and fastened up this letter in the box. Then she directed the case, and as she had a few coppers still in her pocket, she was able to

post and register it. Whilst she ran to the post-office, she left the shop locked. On her return she found a billsticker at the door, trying to get in.

‘All right,’ he said, ‘I don’t want to pawn nothing. Will y’ take a bill and place it in the winder, please?’

He handed Joanna a bill, and went his way.

Lazarus was accommodating in the matter of bills of this description. Notices of Missionary Meetings, Harvest Festivals, a Circus, Services of Song, Ethiopian Serenaders, Prayer Meetings, Dramatic Performances, all went into his window promiscuously. He argued that folks might be attracted to read the bills and then see and fancy an article lying adjacent exposed for sale, a watch, a china figure, a church-service, a pair of opera-glasses, Baxter’s ‘Saints’ Rest,’ a Methodist hymnal, some old lace, a bicycle, or the portrait of an ancestor. Accordingly Joanna accepted the bill, and, before placing it in the window, spread it on the counter, and read it.

The bill was a theatrical notice. It announced the distinguished Polish actress Mdlle. Palma Kaminski, of the Court Theatre, Warsaw,

who had created such enthusiasm in London by her abilities, was about to favour Plymouth with her presence, assisted by a corps of artists, all of eminence only inferior to her own.

The first performance would be a revival of Shakespeare's tragedy of 'Romeo and Juliet,' to be performed the ensuing week.

Joanna had never been to a play, but she was a greedy devourer of playbills. To her imagination, nothing—hardly a ball—could surpass the delight of a dramatic performance. She had read plays that had come into the shop—old comedies, tragedies, modern farces, and had formed an idea of what a theatre was, but Lazarus had never allowed her the pleasure of seeing a performance, even from the gallery.

Whilst she was studying the bill, suddenly Lazarus burst into the shop with livid face. He saw what she was reading, seized it, and crumpled it in his hands.

'Why do you do that?' asked Joanna.

'I have seen her,' gasped the Jew. 'She is here—in Plymouth.'

'Seen whom—Lady Grace?'

'I have seen her—Rachel. She has dared to come here!'

‘What has she come here for? Does she want to return to you? If so, she’s a fool.’

‘This is she,’ he said, opening out the bill he had crushed, and with trembling finger he pointed to the name. ‘She calls herself Palma Kaminski, but she is Rachel Lazarus. A Pole! She is nothing of the sort; she was born on Ratcliff Highway, and bred in Princes Street, Leicester Square.’

‘Are you going to reclaim her, or kill yourself, like Romeo, because she is lost to you?’

‘I do not know what I shall do. I am in a maze,’ gasped the Jew. ‘I’d serve her bad if I knew how. I’d beat her brains out if it weren’t against the law. Where is the liberty of the subject, I’d like to know, as is so boasted of in this precious British empire? Ah! Joanna, I wish I could get her here and put her to sleep in the press-bed, and shut it up when she was sound. The coroner and jury would be sure to find “accidental death,” and one could have a raffle of half a crown a share for the press-bed afterwards, and make a lot of money. I’ve known five pounds got out of a rope a man hanged himself with. The English lower orders are passionately attached to crime;

they like to read about it, and talk about it, and think about it, and relish it in every way. If you come to consider, Joanna, what a dreary world this would be without crime to season it! It would be like a dinner of cold beef without pickles. There'd be no yellow novels on the railway bookstalls, no sensational dramas on the boards; nothing but politics in the papers. I believe there wouldn't be any pawnshops. I'd like to know where we should be, we Jews, Joanna, in such a world as that. There would be no place for us at all. We must be thankful for things as we find them. The world without wickedness in it, and one with it, would be, to my taste, the difference between still hock and sparkling Moselle.'

'I reckon,' said Joanna, 'that in such a place as Kingsbridge, where all is goodness and kindness, and thought of one another, you'd be out of place like a rook on a frosty morning when the worms are in their holes.'

'They've hoodwinked you, like all those who come near them,' said Lazarus. 'But I can't talk of them. I must think of Rachel. Give me the paper.' He drew the bill from Joanna, who had smoothed it out on the counter. 'Kaminski! What a name! to change the

beautiful Lazarus for an outlandish name like that, and she was Moses before I married her. To my mind, Joanna, our British aristocracy is like a scene on a stage, very beautiful to look at, but there is a lot hid away behind very shabby and very bad, of which most folk see and know nothing. You've looked on the grand Kingsbridge House like a young playgoer; all is beautiful, and innocence, and splendour. I know the other side. There is the great burden of debt, fresh loans, that scandal of the Marquess and Rachel. The world knows nothing of all this, but there it is.'

'I should like so much to go to a theatre,' said Joanna with a sigh.

Lazarus considered a moment, then his face lightened; he passed his fingers through his hair, ruffling it on end, giving him a wild look. 'You shall, Joanna; I promise you.'

'The gallery is only sixpence.'

'You shan't go in the gallery.'

'What? Stand outside, where a place costs nothing?'

'No, Joanna, you shall have the most expensive place in the whole theatre, that will cost two or three pounds.'

The girl stared at him. Then he smoothed

down his hair, and elaborately and noisily blew his nose. He was excited.

‘Yes, you shall. I will go also.’

‘When? At doomsday?’

‘No, we will go together, and sit in the stage-box, and see *Romeo and Juliet*.’ Joanna clapped her hands.

‘You shall see Rachel—Kaminski indeed! If she didn’t like Moses, why not condense it to Moss; if she didn’t like Lazarus, why not pull it out into St. Lazare? I’ve known some of our names turned about till you can’t recognise them. Levi and Levison, for instance, who’d know them again as Lewis and Lawson? Even Cohen I’ve known altered into Colquhoun, and but for his nose you’d have thought the man a Scotchman.’

‘You will really let me go?’

‘I will take you myself. We shall be right above her, face her, and see if we do not spoil her play. Joanna, I’ll heap on you all the jewelry in the shop, and you shall blaze in her eyes with diamonds and rubies and sapphires, and you shall have the most splendid dress of silk or satin money can buy; an old second-hand affair won’t do. The best—if I have to send to Worth at Paris for it.’

Joanna looked at him in amazement. Had he lost his senses?

‘Then she’ll see you and me behind, and, sure as she is a daughter of Israel, it will cut her to the heart to think she has forfeited all that heap of jewelry.’

‘But what will she think of me?’

‘I do not know, nor care; she’ll never suppose you are my maid of all work, a pawned piece of goods.’

‘I don’t believe a proper lady would pile on jewelry that way,’ mused Joanna. ‘I heard Lady Grace and Miss Lucy say something about real ladies being known by their quiet dressing. I can’t imagine Lady Grace dressed like that, even at a play.’

‘But you are not Lady Grace,’ argued the Jew. ‘That makes all the difference. She is at the top, and can afford to dress quietly. You are at the bottom, and must dress extravagantly, or you remain what you are—nothing.’

The girl considered; then she said, ‘Miss Rigsby will be there, I am sure she will. She will be all of a blaze. It will be killing fun just to outblaze her. I’ll put on everything I can, and I wish I’d two necks like an Austrian eagle to be able to put on more still.’

CHAPTER XXIX.

TWO STAGE BOXES.

It is impossible in words to describe the tumult of excitement, pride, admiration, in Joanna's bosom, as she took her place in the left stage box at the Plymouth Theatre Royal. She had never been in a theatre before. Her highest ambition had been to battle for herself a way to the front in the gallery. She occupied the most luxurious and expensive place in the theatre. She was dressed so beautifully that her head was turned. The pink silk was nothing to the dress she now wore, crimson velvet and cream-coloured silk, the latter exquisitely hand-embroidered. Her neck, her bosom, her head, were profusely adorned with diamonds. It was a marvel to Joanna whence the Jew had got them all. She wore rings on all her fingers; if the rings were too large, a little silk wound inside enabled her to wear

them. She looked with astonishment at the footlights, at the orchestra where the players were tuning, at that great mystery, the curtain. Then she turned to examine the audience. The gallery and the pit were packed; in the dress circle were about twenty persons, and in the stalls perhaps a dozen. A poor house; a house to take the heart out of an actor. Joanna could not understand it. The rich have money, why do they not come? The poor do not grudge their shillings and sixpences.

Joanna attracted the attention of the house. Opera-glasses were directed towards her. She saw those in the stalls put their heads together, and she knew they were asking each other who she was. She was conscious that she was being admired, and to enable the people to see her better she stood up.

Lazarus was in evening dress, sitting back, facing the stage, so that he was invisible; it was hardly likely he would have been recognised. An evening suit had completely transformed him. Besides, those who attended the theatre were not his clients. He did not shrink from being seen; he was indifferent.

‘Sit down, Joanna. How can you behave so strangely?’ he said.

‘No one could see my velvet bag with old Dutch silver clasps and chain and belt unless I stood up,’ she answered.

‘Perhaps you would like to stand up on the breasting of the box, to let folks see your red shoes?’

‘I shouldn’t mind,’ said Joanna.

‘But I do. Sit down and be quiet. The orchestra are going to begin. I did not bring you here to make a fool of yourself.’

‘Very well, master. I’ll fan myself, and then they can see my bracelets.’

Joanna was like a child with a box of new toys. She looked at herself in the little strip of mirror in the box, she played with and admired her jewelry, she took peeps at her feet shod in crimson satin shoes, she pressed back her chin to be able to see the glitter of a diamond brooch on her bosom. One bitter disappointment she had been forced to endure. She had desired to appear in low dress, but on trying one on, it was found that the contrast in colour between her face and one half of her neck and her bosom, and the other half of her neck, was too startling to allow of her thus appearing.

A tap at the door behind, and a gentleman

entered the box. Joanna uttered a cry of delight, and took several steps to meet him. The gentleman was Charles Cheek.

‘Why, Joanna!’ he exclaimed, ‘you here, in the royal box, as queen of beauty, wearing all the Crown jewels stolen by Lazarus from the Tower!’

‘I am glad to see you again,’ she said heartily. ‘Here is a chair, sit down beside me and talk till the play begins, and then be mum.’

‘I was in the stalls. I could hardly believe my eyes,’ he said, ‘but I looked and looked through my glasses till I had nearly satisfied myself you were my little friend of the roof-tree, when Lazarus’s nose came round the corner, and a bit of a cheek-bone, and then I was sure. What has induced you, Father Abraham, to come here dressed like a Christian? Have you brought the girl to show off a set of diamonds you want to sell?’

‘I’ve brought her here,’ answered the Jew, ‘because I am a generous and indulgent master. She saved my house from fire and from burglars, and has deserved a treat for other services she has rendered me, so I have stepped out of my usual course of life to indulge her.’

‘Do you often come to the play?’ asked Joanna.

‘Very often. I would come always if I thought you would be here.’

‘Sit down, and don’t throw foolish speeches at me which you do not mean. I am so glad to see you again. Do you know, I have learned to dance since I saw you last—waltz, and cotillon, and lancers, and quadrille—these last very imperfectly for want of enough to make up sets; for want of persons we danced with chairs.’

‘Where have you been? Who taught you?’

‘Those are secrets which even you may not know.’

‘Why are you not in the pink silk and pearls I gave you?’

‘I am more splendid now; do look at me well. What do you think of this gown—puffed and slashed at the sleeves? is it not lovely, like a lady in an old painting? Look down at my shoes. They are sweet. Once, do you recollect, you laughed at me because I was in my stocking-soles, and there were holes in the stockings. Now there is not even a thread wrong in my stockings, and the shoes are simply lovely.’

‘Have you worn out the pink silk?’

‘No. Mr. Lazarus spilt salt water over it, and it is spoiled. He was forced to give me this instead.’

‘I!’ cried the Jew. ‘I have not given you this. Do not believe the girl, it is not true. The gown is hired for the night, at one guinea.’

‘Hold your tongues, both of you!’ said Joanna. ‘The overture has begun.’

The Jew was not particularly pleased at Charles Cheek appearing in the box and remaining there, but he could not tell him to leave. He drew back among the folds of the coloured hangings, with his eyes on the curtain, and looked sulky. Charles Cheek and Joanna entirely disregarded him.

‘I say,’ whispered the girl during the overture, ‘why are there so few persons in the more expensive seats?’

‘Because,’ answered the young man, ‘the better-class people despise provincial theatres; it is *chic* to do so. It means that they have seen things so much better done in London that they cannot endure what is inferior.’

‘But they lose great enjoyment by this nonsense.’

‘Of course they do, but——’ He shrugged his shoulders.

‘Hush! Oh, do hush!’ exclaimed Joanna. ‘See! see!’

The curtain rose. Then she had eyes and ears only for the stage. In the third scene Juliet makes her first appearance. Lazarus had been moving uneasily through the two former. He bit his nails, wiped his brow, and became every moment paler. Then he put his hand forward, touched Mr. Cheek, and said somewhat roughly, ‘Excuse me, I want the front chair.’ The young man started, looked surprised, and at once surrendered the seat. ‘I am short-sighted,’ explained the Jew. Mr. Cheek bowed, and withdrew to his place in the stalls.

Joanna was annoyed, not so much at losing her companion as at the disturbance, distracting her attention from the play. She frowned, and tapped her fan impatiently on the cushion.

Lazarus sat beside her, his face turned towards the stage; she saw that it was cadaverous, and that his muscles twitched with nervousness.

Next moment she had forgotten him to observe Juliet. At the appearance of Mdlle.

Palma Kaminski, the famous Polish actress from the Imperial Theatre, Warsaw, the gallery burst into applause. The pit took up the applause ; the clapping of hands, thumping of heels and umbrella ferrules on the floor for a minute brought the play to a standstill. The dress circle languidly patted its hands, the stalls remained unmoved.

In recognition of this reception, Mdle. Palma stepped forward to the footlights and curtseyed ; as she did so, she raised her eyes and looked at the boxes for a moment ; her eyes remained fixed on the stage box on her right only for a moment, and then she turned her head away without a token of emotion. Lazarus leaned back, his face quivering, his hands clenched. Their eyes had met.

Joanna observed the famous actress with the closest attention. This was Rachel—the beautiful Rachel whom Lazarus had loved, and who had wrecked his life. This was she who had so bewitched the Marquess that he had forgotten honour and right, and had run away with her to Sicily. Joanna was sufficiently near to see the make-up in her face, the paint, the powder, the antimony about the eyes, the rouge on the cheeks. She saw that Rachel

was lovely, had been very lovely, but—fatal *but*—she was becoming stout.

Joanna laughed. The consciousness was borne in on her that she was herself more beautiful than this woman who had made two men miserable—who had broken two lives. The applause had just ceased, and a short silence succeeded before the performers resumed their dialogue. On that short interval of silence Joanna's laugh broke, and instantly the beautiful actress looked at her. She looked intently, questioningly; then turned her eyes for a moment, only for a moment, on Lazarus.

None observed this but Joanna, not even Lazarus, who had drawn back and covered his eyes. There was something in the look that startled Joanna. The colour mounted and suffused her face and throat. Her pleasure in the play was gone; she wished she were away. She hid her arms lest the bracelets should be seen; she threw a kerchief round her neck to hide the chains. With a look the actress had revenged the laugh.

Joanna was not able to recover her interest in the play. She looked on, but her thoughts were elsewhere. She was glad that Lazarus had withdrawn and concealed himself in the

shadow, leaning against the side of the box.

When the first act was over, she signed with her fan to Charles Cheek, and he came up from the stalls.

‘A poor company,’ said he, taking the seat she indicated. ‘I hold that the educated are quite right in staying away; in the provinces the star system is reduced to absurdity. What a stiff Lady Capulet! and a nurse without humour. Romeo is a stick. We have not seen yet what La Palma is made of. She is beautiful, but plump. A few years ago, may be, she was irresistible. Hollo, some *vis-à-vis*, I see.’

The box-keeper was introducing a party of two gentlemen and two ladies into the stage-box immediately opposite. Joanna at once recognised the Marquess of Saltcombe, the Rigsbys and Miss Stokes. Lazarus, leaning back with his face to the curtain, did not notice the arrivals; Joanna glanced over her shoulder at him, and saw that he was too preoccupied with his own thoughts to look about him.

She fixed her eyes very attentively on the Marquess. He was serene, polite to Miss Rigsby, contending with the aunt which should hold the niece’s scarf of woven blue and

crimson silk and gold fibre—an Indian manufacture.

The curtain rose; Romeo proceeded to climb the wall into Capulet's garden. The lights were turned down, and a ray was cast, purporting to be that of the moon, on Juliet's window. There was not sufficient light in the stage-box opposite for Joanna to see the face of Lord Saltcombe. The moonbeam was unsteady on Juliet's window, and badly focussed. But when Juliet sighed 'Ah me!' she thought she saw him start. Joanna watched the box opposite throughout the scene far more closely than the stage.

The footlights were turned up for the next scene, that in Friar Laurence's cell, and then Joanna was able to see the face of the Marquess. It was pale as death. Miss Rigsby leaned back in her chair and spoke to him as he was standing behind her, and he stooped and replied. He handed her a playbill, and pointed with his finger to something on it. Perhaps she had asked him who was the Romeo making such hot love to Juliet. Joanna saw that he maintained his composure outwardly. Only his deadly pallor showed how stirred he was within. He had come to the theatre with the Rigsbys,

with whom he had dined, in complete ignorance of the fact that the Polish actress from Warsaw was Rachel Lazarus. Joanna turned to her master ; she saw at a glance that he had recognised his enemy. His face was convulsed ; he drew further back into the shadows, that he might not be seen.

Joanna looked from one man to the other. Here were two men, one at the head of the scale, the other at the foot—both the victims of one beautiful woman. ‘What power there is in woman for good or bad!’ thought Joanna. ‘For my part,’ she added to herself, ‘I would hurt no one—unless he got in my way.’

It amused the girl to notice the slightly foreign intonation in Juliet’s voice as she spoke. Knowing what she did of her origin, she was sure that this was put on to keep up the part of Pole Rachel had assumed. ‘She is clever,’ thought Joanna ; ‘clever to control herself under the eyes of the two men she has ruined. But perhaps she has not as yet recognised the Marquess.’ The light was on her face, and he was in darkness. ‘I wonder what she will do when she does see him?’

‘Joanna,’ said the Jew, in a whisper that was

hoarse and constrained, 'I want to go. Get ready.'

She answered, 'I am not going. I came for one play, and I am in for two.'

'I am not well.'

'Then get better. I am not going.'

During the scene in Capulet's garden between Juliet and the nurse, Joanna watched the actress, but was unable to detect whether she had seen the Marquess or not. Once her eyes travelled in the direction of the stage box on her left, but the glance was quick and passing, and no muscle of her face, no failure of her voice, gave sign that she had perceived her former lover.

The curtain fell on the second act; as it fell, one of the footlights flared and snapped the glass chimney that screened it. No one paid particular attention to it; the broken glass was not removed, a fresh chimney not added.

Charles Cheek brought Joanna an ice: he offered one to Lazarus, who refused with a shake of the head.

'He is not well,' said Joanna. 'Leave him alone; he wants to go away, but I will not hear of it till the play is out. Don't notice him. He will be better presently.'

‘I’ll get you a drop of brandy, Mr. Lazarus.’

The Jew nodded, and the good-natured young man hurried away to fetch a glass of spirits.

‘Do you know who those are opposite us?’ asked Mr. Charles Cheek, on his return. ‘I’ve heard one is the Marquess of Saltcombe, son of the Duke of Kingsbridge, and the other people are called Rigsbys. I don’t know anything about them.’

‘The Marquess is engaged to Miss Rigsby—that pasty young lady in magenta silk and pink roses in her hair. The person at her side is her aunt, and the brown man is her father. They are worth a great deal of money.’

‘How do you know all this?’

‘In the way of business,’ answered the girl, with an air of indifference.

‘I have heard inquiries on all sides as to who you are. People have been lost in wonder and admiration. What is your name? I must satisfy those who ask. I have been unable to do so out of ignorance.’

‘I am Miss Rosevere, an heiress,’ answered Joanna.

‘An heiress?’ echoed Charles Cheek with a laugh.

‘Yes, sole heiress, executrix, and residuary legatee to Mr. Lazarus.’ She turned round to her master with a mischievous face. He was in no mood to answer.

‘How are you?’ asked the young man. ‘Better? Has the brandy revived you?’

Lazarus nodded.

‘So I may answer to inquiries that you are a Miss Rosevere.’

‘Yes. That is my name, though I don’t often have it mentioned. You may add—an orphan. Go back to your place in the stalls and tell those who ask who I am. You need not add—slave to a Jew pawnbroker—pawned for ten shillings. Don’t say that, as you value my friendship.’ So she dismissed him, then leaned on the red velvet cushion, playing with her fan, looking about her, and watching what went on in the stage box opposite. Mr. Rigsby was in conversation with Lord Saltcombe: his voice was loud and harsh, and Joanna could almost catch what he said. He was talking about an amateur dramatic performance got up by the officers at Colombo. Some delay ensued before the curtain rose. The orchestra performed a selection from ‘Il Trovatore.’ A smell of oranges pervaded the theatre. The gods were

devouring them in great quantities in the gallery, and throwing the peel over into the pit. A bald-headed gentleman was the object they particularly aimed at, and when an urchin succeeded in casting an entire ingeniously removed peel so as to light in a ring on his glossy skull, like a cap, the feat was uproariously applauded.

The noise only ceased when the curtain rose on a public place, and attention was arrested by the fight between Mercutio and Tybalt: those in the gallery were greatly disappointed that the former died off the stage, and only reconciled when Tybalt was killed by Romeo under their eyes.

The scene that followed gave less promise of amusement. Juliet appeared in her room, invoking the approach of night:

‘Gallop apace, you fiery-footed steeds,
Towards Phœbus’ lodging.’

As she spoke her passionate monologue she came forward, and as she did so, the draught from her skirts made the jet of the broken footlight flare up.

‘There should be a wire net about eighteen inches off the lamps,’ said Mr. Rigsby. ‘I see

none here but in town it is so, is it not, Saltcombe?’

Lord Saltcombe bowed, he could not speak. Rachel’s eyes had met his at the exclamation, ‘Give me my Romeo.’ The nurse entered, bringing the rope-ladder and the news of the death of Tybalt, which she delivers so badly that Juliet for the moment supposes she is told of the loss of her lover. This is the first occasion on which an actress of any power can show passion. Palma rose to it. With a piercing cry that rang through the house she rushed forward, threw up her arms, and was convulsed with agony.

‘O break, my heart!—poor bankrupt, break at once!’

Then dashing her hands over her eyes—

‘To prison, eyes! ne’er look on liberty.’

Stooping, gathering up the dust, then throwing it down, as into a grave at a funeral—

‘Vile earth, to earth resign; end motion here :
And thou, and Romeo——’

She did not finish the sentence, the whole theatre rose with a cry of horror. The flame from the exposed jet had caught the white

gauze of Juliet's dress and danced up her skirt.

The agitation was indescribable. Women shrieked, men shouted. The curtain fell, and a smell of fire pervaded the atmosphere lately impregnated with the odour of oranges.

Miss Rigsby looked round.

The Marquess had uttered a cry of agony, and had fallen against the partition, with his hand to his brow. In another moment he dashed from the box and ran behind the scenes.

'For mercy's sake,' he cried, 'how is she? Where is she?'

The stage manager brushed past him. The roar of voices mingled with cries beyond the curtain drowned his voice. The actors were in agitation. The commotion in the house ceased instantly when the manager appeared before the curtain.

'Ladies and gentlemen, a most unfortunate accident has happened. I believe and trust there is no occasion for alarm.' A burst of cheers. 'Mdlle. Palma Kaminski is not as seriously hurt as might have been anticipated.' Renewed cheers. 'I have to ask your kind indulgence; the performance must cease.' He

was himself so excited that he could hardly speak. His face was white, and his voice shook.

‘Where is she?’ asked the Marquess as the stage-manager stepped back.

‘She has been conveyed to her lodgings.’

CHAPTER XXX.

PALMA.

PALMA was driven at once to the house in which she had secured lodgings; one of the ladies of the company attended her. She was in great pain. A couple of surgeons were promptly summoned. The rumour of what had occurred spread, and people collected in the streets and about the door. The medical men said the case was grave, and that a nurse must be in constant attendance.

‘Lord bless me!’ said the old woman whose lodgings were taken by Palma. ‘Where am I to get a nurse?’

‘Her relations must be telegraphed for.’

‘Blessings on me! What do I know about her relations?’

‘We will see about a nurse. Perhaps one can be spared from the hospital.’

A rap at the door, and ring of the bell.

The woman opened it and saw a girl standing outside in a plain stuff gown, and a shawl over her head.

‘Who are you?’ she asked. ‘What do you please to want?’

‘I’m come to offer to nurse her,’ was the reply. ‘I’ve been sent; that is, I’ve come from him who stands nighest and yet furthest from her in the world.’

‘Who is that?’

‘Her husband.’

‘If that be the case, come in. You are young. Can you nurse?’

‘I can do what the doctor orders, and I hope I have my wits about me.’

‘What is your name?’

‘Rosevere.’

‘Very well,’ said the lodging-house keeper. ‘I reckon you’ll do as well as another.—Please, sir,’ to the surgeon, ‘give the young woman orders what she is to do.’

When the accident had taken place Joanna had turned home and stripped off her grand dress and donned a plain one; then she came down into the kitchen, where Lazarus was crouching over the fire.

‘It is a judgment,’ said the Jew. ‘Heaven is

just, and has cast its thunderbolt at her. I am glad of it. No one hurts me without suffering for it.'

Joanna turned on him. 'I am going to her,' she said. 'I shall nurse her if they will let me. Shall I say you sent me?'

'No,' answered the Jew; 'don't mention my name.' He had assumed a hardness which ill concealed his inward emotion. In his breast was a tumult of mingled feeling—old love revived, sorrow, revenge, hate—so mixed that he did not himself know what he desired.

'You may go, Joanna,' he said. 'If she needs anything—that is, in moderation—let me know, but I will not see her, I will not see her, remember that.'

So Joanna went. The girl was greatly affected. Tears came into her eyes, but she drove them back. She had made up her mind to be with Palma. She went first to the theatre to ascertain where the actress lived; the house was not far distant. She hastened thither. On her way down the street she passed Lord Saltcombe. His face was raised, he was looking at a window whence a yellow light shone through a drawn blind. Shadows passed over

the surface of the blind. A gas lamp was near, and the face of Lord Saltcombe was illumined. It was full of agony—it was the face of a man in despair. She walked by, then turned and came back to him; his suffering face filled her with pity. She said in a low tone, ‘Lord Saltcombe, I am going in to nurse her. Ask no questions at the door. I will give you signs at the window: when I hold up my hands, have hope; when I hold them down, her case is very bad; when I hold them out, and you see against the blind the black shadow of a cross—she is dead.’

He nodded. He did not recognise her, he did not look at her. He did not wonder who she was that knew him by name. He tried to thank her. He could not.

Then she went on. If she had been refused admission she would have thrust herself in. Joanna was not one to take a refusal.

She was conducted to the room where lay the poor woman. Cotton-wool and oil covered her wounds. The face was uninjured. She moaned and tossed her head from side to side on the pillow. The paint was on the cheeks, the antimony darkened the eyes, but tears had washed the white powder away in long furrows.

Beneath the paint the flame of fever burnt in her cheeks. Joanna took a sponge and washed her face. The cool water soothed the sufferer for a moment, then she began again to moan and turn her head with a mechanical regularity from side to side. She seemed imperfectly conscious. Her fellow-actress was at her side ; the honest sympathetic tears had washed her face into a strange mottle. She had hold of Palma's hand, and patted and kissed it, and spoke to her cheering words of promise of health.

‘ You'll be all right to-morrow. You know you are going to take the world by storm with your Lady of Lyons. There! don't be down. It is only a trifle. You did Juliet regular splendid—first-class to-night.’

‘ You may go,’ said Joanna. ‘ You are out of place here and do not understand the management of the sick. Leave her to me. I am sent to her.’

‘ Are you experienced, girl?’ asked the surgeon.

‘ I know what is what,’ answered Joanna, looking him full in the face.

‘ You have plenty of natural cleverness, I can see,’ said the surgeon. ‘ Now attend to me.’

I will give you instructions that must be closely followed.'

'Hadn't that lady better go first? she bothers me and Ra—— I mean the sick woman.'

'I agree with you.' The surgeon dismissed the actress.

'Now,' said Joanna, 'say what you will, I will not go from it a hair's-breadth.'

After receiving her instructions she said gravely, 'Tell me frankly : is there hope?'

'Where there is life there is hope,' he answered.

She looked at him with her shrewd eyes, and standing between the light and the window, held up *one* arm.

Lord Saltcombe paced the street hour after hour throughout the night. He could not leave it. Rest was impossible. One by one the lights in the houses were extinguished, but the window of Palma's room remained illumined. Within lay the woman—the sole woman—he had ever loved, and he had loved her with all the passion in his nature. Carried away by that passion he had committed a great wrong, a wrong which rankled in his heart. His conscience never acquitted him ; it judged and condemned him daily. If he had loved innocently he might have shaken

off his passion, or been spared by it to make himself a name, to become great and good among his fellow-men. But this guilty incident had morally maimed him. He had not the energy, the courage, after that, to face his fellow-men. There are some who rise after a fall, stronger than they were before. Their fall has taught them caution, has deepened their character, has inspired them with earnestness. There are others who, when once tripped up, lie prostrate the rest of their days. Such was Lord Saltcombe. He had not the moral vigour to efface the past by active well-doing.

The clock of St. Andrew's Church chimed after the stroke of three, and still the Marquess was in the street. He was cold and tired. An icy perspiration covered his brow. He had seen the sign at the window three or four hours before ; it had not given him much hope. A gnawing pain was at his heart. Was this the first manifestation in him of that disease which sapped the life and activity of his father? Had his present great emotion provoked it to warn him of its presence?

The chimes had scarce done playing 'The Last Rose of Summer' when the blind was drawn aside, and Lord Saltcombe saw the girl

beckoning to him. In another moment the house door was opened gently, and she appeared at it. She held her finger to her lips, came outside, and said, 'Rachel is conscious. Come, and see her, but promise to go when I give the word.' He nodded. 'Follow me softly, make no noise. Everyone else in the house is asleep.'

He obeyed. He was in his patent-leather boots, in his dress suit, with a light overcoat. He stepped softly after Joanna. If anyone heard the steps, that person supposed it was the footfall of the doctor, turned in bed, and slept again. Joanna thrust open the chamber door and let the Marquess in. She did not enter herself, she closed the door and stood on the landing with her hands to her ears that she might not hear what was said. As Lord Saltcombe passed her into the room she looked in his face; it was older by many years, white, lined, hollow about the eyes, and sunken at the cheeks. Her heart came into her mouth, she put her hands to her white apron, and raising it wiped her eyes, then shook her head defiantly, and clasped her hands over her ears.

Lord Saltcombe stepped up to the bed, looking with his whole soul into the burning

face of the poor woman. Then he sobbed, sank on his knees by her side, and hid his face in the bedclothes.

‘Herbert!’ she said in a low tone, and put out her hand for his, ‘I wanted to see you—to say good-bye.’

‘Rachel!’ He could utter no more.

‘It is now seven years since—since Sicily.’

‘Rachel,’ he said, ‘God forgive me. If it were possible in any way to undo the past, if it were within my power to make compensation, to expiate the wrong done, I would do my utmost. Rachel, I ruined your life, and I destroyed the honour and happiness of another man’s home.’

She shook her head. ‘You do not know Lazarus.’

‘It matters nothing who or what he be; I wronged him past undoing, and the knowledge of this has lamed my life. You—you above all——’

‘Do not speak of me,’ she said. ‘I forgive you—but you were not in fault. I had set my heart on the stage; I ran away for the love of art—not for love of you.’

‘Is that true?’

She slightly moved her head. ‘The consciousness of power burned in me, and life with

Lazarus and his sordid belongings was unendurable. I ran away; you know I forced myself on you, I asked you to free me. It was not that I cared for you—forgive me that I say so; if I pain you it is for your good—I used you but as a means of escape. I hungered for art; I knew that the stage was my proper sphere; and now—and now—I am consumed in the element I elected.’ Her head began to turn from side to side uneasily.

He did not speak, he watched her in silent remorse and agony. She had shut her eyes. He was not sure whether she were conscious. He held her hand; it was a hand of fire. Presently she stayed the rocking of her head, and opened her eyes. ‘It was I,’ she said—‘it was I who spoiled your life, not you mine. I have nothing to forgive. I must ask pardon of you.’

‘Of me! Oh, Rachel!’

‘I used you but as a means to an end. Who were you with in the stage box to-night—yesterday—when was it?’

He told her.

‘You are not married?’ she asked, and looked at him.

He shook his head.

‘You must marry, and forget me,’ she said. ‘It was I—it was I who was in the wrong.’ Presently she added, ‘Beware of Lazarus; he will never forget, never forgive.’ Then she shut her eyes, and began again to sway her head and moan.

He watched her without speaking; she let go his hand, and held her fingers up as feeling for something in the air.

‘What do you want, Rachel?’

She turned her face and opened her eyes; the light of reason had gone from them. She put her arm out of the bedclothes, and waved it:

‘Farewell! God knows when we shall meet again.
I have a faint cold fear thrills through my veins,
That almost freezes up the heat of life.
Nurse! what should she do here?
My dismal scene I needs must act alone.’

She thought herself on the stage. She tried to rise, and moaned and fell back.

Joanna entered; she did not raise her eyes to the face of Lord Saltcombe. She signed to him to go; he stood a moment longer looking at the poor woman, now unconscious, and stole away.

Then Joanna seated herself by the bed, and

watched the sufferer. Her face, generally brimming with intelligence and full of self-assurance, was now kindled with an expression of tenderness and pity such as it had not borne before. She knew the whole story of this dying woman. She had been brought to look upon a heart—a man's heart—enduring unutterable agony. She put out her finger and touched the bedclothes where moistened; she knew what had moistened them—tears of contrition and humiliation wrung from the heart of an honourable man. She bent her head to the ear of Palma, and whispered, 'Will you send a message to Emmanuel Lazarus?'

The eyes opened and looked dimly at her, but no answer came.

Lord Saltcombe lingered in the street. He would not leave the neighbourhood of the house. The night was cold, and the wind raw; a fog blew up from the sea, and stole in filmy coils along the street, drifting past the lamps and forming halos about them. He walked faster, up and down, up and down, turning his eyes ever at the lighted window. The clock struck four—it struck five, and he was still there. Before dawn the cold became keener, eating into the marrow. Then the chimes of

St. Andrew's played 'Home, sweet Home,' and as they played, against the lighted window appeared the shadow of a black cross.

Lord Saltcombe removed his hat, and stood with folded hands looking at the cross ; then up, with dim eyes, through the fog above.

CHAPTER XXXI.

A SPOKE IN THE WHEEL.

MR. RIGSBY had taken a handsome house for the winter at Stoke, above Devonport, or rather between Devonport and Plymouth. The house commanded a view over the entire harbour, with Maker Point and Mount Edgcumbe. A more beautiful bay is not to be found the world over. The hills are bold, some bare, others richly wooded ; the creeks are numerous, the beautiful Hamoaze opening into the bay is like a hand, every finger of which is a lovely blue estuary, and this fair hand is full of vessels. Far away to the head of the water rise the peaks of Dartmoor above rolling woods and hills, studded with white houses and grey church towers. Mr. Rigsby was not easily satisfied ; he was determined to have a good house, and he got the best, with large gardens sloping down the hill, lawns, tennis-

ground enclosed within yew hedges, and terraces with roses.

He had roughed it in Ceylon in old days ; the bungalow in which Dulcina had been brought up was plain, and slenderly furnished. In England Mr. Rigsby was exacting. Dulcina would be a duchess, and he must show the world that he had a fortune that allowed him to live like a prince. He bought carriages and horses, and engaged servants, put the men in the Rigsby livery of buff and blue, made his coachman powder his hair and sit on a hammer-cloth. He sent orders to town for pictures, and had the house put into the hands of a decorative adviser.

‘I know nothing about art furniture,’ he said. ‘So long as I have a chair to sit on, it is all one to me what is the shape, but—one must be in fashion, or risk being thought a boor.’

He had his own rooms plainly furnished—a hard bed, and no carpets on the floors. ‘I like to spit,’ he said, ‘and carpets get in the way of spitting.’ He had his Cingalese manservant, who understood his wants, and none of the other men were allowed near him. He lived very much to himself, smoking and reading Indian papers in his snuggerly, and it was

with difficulty that he could be drawn from it to entertain guests in the drawing-room.

He was sitting in his room, with a fire in the grate, and his feet against the marble jambs, when he was told that a visitor was desirous of speaking to him on urgent business.

‘Who is it? a gentleman or a lady? A gentleman! Show him in here. Confound it all, can I not be left an hour in peace? In the drawing-room, is he? Has he not given you his card? No! Deuce take it, I suppose I must go in to him. Here, take off my smoking jacket, and help me into my coat. I can’t go in my slippers. Give me my boots. What a life I lead here? I wish I were back in Ceylon!’

As soon as he was presentable Mr. Rigsby went to the drawing-room. He saw there a stoutly built man with grey black hair, and dark eyes like sloes. There was no mistaking his nationality. Nose and eyes and cheek-bones proclaimed it. He was well dressed. As Mr. Rigsby entered he rose and bowed.

‘I beg your pardon,’ said Mr. Rigsby, with some stiffness, ‘I did not learn your name. Perhaps my man forgot it, perhaps you did not give it. You said you had business with me.’

‘My name is of little importance,’ said the

stranger. ‘It is quite true that I have called on business. I have heard, sir, that you are desirous of furnishing this most charming residence with everything that taste and luxury demands. My name, sir, is Lazarus—Emmanuel Lazarus, of the “Golden Balls,” Barbican. I happen to have, sir, a very choice collection of artistic odds and ends, which I offer at a ridiculously low price. I am a collector of objects of art and antiquity, and it is my pleasure to furnish gentlemen of taste and means with the best treasures of the past. I have also some very nice old Spanish lace, which your beautiful young lady might like to see. I got the spoils of several churches at a bargain, the lace is from the altars, and I shall be proud to think that one whom I hear on all sides spoken of as an Oriental star should wear it. Old china, sir! no man can call himself a gentleman, whatever his birth and fortune, or invite friends to his house without a blush, if he has not his cheffonniers and side-tables and walls covered with old china. Old silver also, sir, is greatly in request. I happen to have some very choice apostle spoons. No one can hold up his head in society without at least a couple of apostle spoons in Dutch silver sugar basins.’

‘Thank you,’ said Mr. Rigsby; ‘I understand none of these things. I have put myself into the hands of a decorator.’

‘Would you mind telling me, sir, the style in which the decorator is going to do you up? Louis Quatorze, Queen Anne, Chippendale, or Victorian? Are you going to be painted over with cranes and sunflowers? I’ve known a lady dadoed round, with a skirting of Japanese rush mats, all gilt, and very effective it was. If you’ll allow me to suggest you that, sir, you would find it neat and warm. I happen to have a quantity of these rush mats all plaited in different patterns. Or are you going into Chippendale, and have your legs curved, and turned fine, and fluted? I don’t hold to having your legs made too spindly. There is a loss of strength. Still, fashion is for it. I have some of the very finest Chippendale ever seen in stock: I can give you legs that are in the first style, and yet are not spindly. Or—if I may make so bold as to ask—are you going to be Rococo?’

Mr. Rigsby stared. ‘I do not understand——’

‘A combination of rock and shell. Are they going to enerust you with rockwork and shellwork, and scoop out curves in you and fill

in with flowers, and not leave you a straight line anywhere, and gild you from top to toe? The effect is gorgeous rather than classic. The First Empire is a reaction against that, severe, subdued—nude. Are you going in for that? If so, I have some choice little articles, clocks and side-tables and mirrors.'

Mr. Rigsby stood up. 'Sir, I am very busy; I leave all this to the decorator. I am incompetent to judge for myself. One thing you may be quite sure of: I will never go in for the nude. The climate don't admit of it. It is different altogether in Ceylon. I wish you good morning.'

'Stay, stay!' exclaimed the Jew, alarmed at the prospect of losing his opportunity in his over-eagerness to deal. 'Might I ask one thing more, sir? I have matter of the utmost importance to communicate. I cannot speak of the matter in this room. I am afraid of being overheard. It is not about Louis Quatorze, or Rococo, or First Empire.'

'There is no one here. We are quite alone, but I cannot imagine you can have anything to communicate that will interest me. I have put myself into the hands of a decorator, and given him *carte blanche*.'

‘If you wish it. Will you hear me patiently for five minutes?’

Mr. Rigsby looked at the French clock. It had stopped. He took out his watch. ‘I can only spare you three. I am most busy.’

‘I will crush all I have to say into three minutes. Only I entreat you, my dear sir, to have patience with me, and allow me fully to explain the circumstances to you. In your presence, sir, in the presence, sir, of a man of your colossal fortune, I feel myself so agitated, so unable to gather my thoughts, that——’

‘I am ready to listen to you during three minutes. I cannot allow more. My time is of exceeding value, I am pressed with business which may not be postponed. I see by my watch that only two minutes remain.’

‘I will make haste, sir, but the presence of a Goliath of wealth overawes me. I have heard, sir, of the immensity of your fortune, and I know that such a fortune could not be accumulated without great genius.’

Mr. Rigsby spread his breast by putting his thumbs through his waistcoat armholes. Peacocks, when vain, spread their tails; men, when proud, their bosoms.

‘I admit that I am not a fool, if that satis-

fies you,' said Mr. Rigsby, 'but please proceed to business.'

'You will excuse me when I say that your fortune, acquired by hard labour and rack-ing of brain, must not be thrown away blindly.'

'Set your mind quite at ease, Mr. Lazarus; my property is safe, and its security in no way concerns you.'

'You must excuse me if I dispute this; I see you on the point of throwing everything away.'

Mr. Rigsby assumed a stare of disgust and indignation.

'You are presuming. One minute more.'

'I understand that you are about to see your most beautiful, talented, and fascinating daughter married to the Marquess of Salt-combe.'

Mr. Rigsby rose. 'Really, Mr. Lazarus, I must decline to have my private affairs discussed by you.'

'I am not discussing them, sir; I am here to warn you.'

'To warn me of what? of sitting on spindle-legged Chippendale. Five seconds more.'

‘Of marrying your daughter to a bankrupt profligate!’ exclaimed Lazarus rising.

‘What do you mean? The words are insulting.’

‘The epithets describe him exactly. Bankrupt he and all his family are; and he is only seeking the hand of your daughter to save himself and his whole house from utter, irretrievable ruin.’

‘Good God!’ exclaimed the planter. ‘What do you mean?’

‘I mean what I say. If you want proof, I have it. I have it by me here.’

Mr. Rigsby burst out laughing. ‘Preposterous! The Duke has an enormous fortune, to which mine is a fleabite. I have seen how he lives.’

‘The Duke is over head and ears in debt. He cannot pay interest on his mortgages. He has borrowed money right and left, and lives from hand to mouth. In a month, I—that is, the creditors—will take steps to foreclose; it is because the Marquess and his family hope to stave off ruin with your money that they stoop to accept your daughter into the family.’

‘Stoop! stoop to Dulcina!’ exclaimed Mr. Rigsby. ‘Come into my smoking-room. This

matter must not be discussed here. Miss Rigsby or Miss Stokes, or one of the flunkeys, might be dropping in—visitors calling—heaven knows what. Follow me into my study. I have plenty of time at my disposal. I have nothing to do, and will hear you patiently. Good heavens! Bankrupt! Ruined! Dulcina snapped at for her money! Thunder and blazes! Follow me.'

He led the way into his smoking-room, which he called his study, though no books were in it.

'Excuse me,' he said, 'I cannot think in this coat. My ideas won't move in boots. Allow me to put on my smoking jacket and slippers: my time is at your disposal.'

'I have here,' said the Jew, taking a chair by the table—'I have in this little book a *précis* of the income and expenditure and debts of the family. I have got more; I have here a packet of notes of hand, and a couple of mortgages, one on Court Royal manor and estate, which will convince you that I am not exaggerating when I say that the family is on the verge of ruin. Please cast your eye over these accounts; they were extracted by a confidential agent from the books in the steward's office,

without his knowledge. In love and war and business, everything is fair.'

Mr. Rigsby sat down. His face became mottled, he could not sit comfortably on his chair; he turned it, then turned it again. 'Good heavens!' he said, 'who would have thought it? It is impossible.'

'It is true, absolutely true.'

Mr. Rigsby stood up and walked to the window, where he stood for some minutes drumming on the glass with his fingers.

'I was not told this,' he said.

'Of course you were kept in the dark.'

'I shall tie everything up to my daughter's sole use.'

'Then they will not say "Thank you" for your daughter. They only want her because they expect through her to get at your purse.'

Mr. Rigsby came back to the table, and took up the schedule of debts, bills, and mortgages.

'Some of these are for enormous sums, of old standing, never redeemed.'

'Never likely to be redeemed, unless you find the money.'

'But I cannot find the amount. I should sink everything.'

‘This is the state of affairs : I have felt it my duty to inform you of it. If the young people love each other so dearly that your daughter is ready to make the sacrifice, then I have nothing to say against the marriage ; but I think it well that both she and you should be made aware of the character of the man to whom she is about to entrust the happiness of her life. I have shown you that there is reason to believe that the marriage is desired by the family for the sake of your money. You are not perhaps aware why it is that the Marquess has not been married already.’

‘No, I do not know.’

‘I will tell you. Because of a scandal. He ran away with a beautiful woman, the wife of a respectable man of business. The woman is now an actress. You have seen her, Palma Kaminski.’

Mr. Rigsby looked at him with pale face and open mouth.

‘He fell in love with her a few years ago, and carried her away with him to Sicily. After a while they parted, but whether the scandal has stood in the way of a woman of character accepting him as husband, or whether he has never ceased to love her, I cannot say. She disappeared for a while ; where she has been

living, whether under his protection or not, I do not know. You saw her yesterday. You noticed his agitation when an accident happened to her.'

'Merciful heaven!' exclaimed Mr. Rigsby, putting his hands to his brow, and leaning his elbows on the table. 'What a wicked world this is! I wish I were back in Ceylon!'

'He visited the house where she lodged, after the accident. Let us hope it was only to say good-bye for ever, before marrying your daughter.'

'If this be true he never shall marry my daughter. Oh dear, oh dear! What misery might have ensued had she become his—and this not have come out till after! Poor Dulcina! But—' he raised himself on one elbow —'I cannot understand your motive coming here and telling me this. What is the happiness of Dulcina to you? What concern is it of yours whether I lose my fortune among titled adventurers?'

'None at all,' answered the Jew dryly.

'I don't believe a word about the actress,' exclaimed the planter desperately. 'Why should I not use my money, if I please, to extricate the estate? It will come to my daughter in the

end. I shall not lose my money. Whatever I do is for my child. As for this scandalous story, I don't and I won't believe it. I will ask Saltcombe the truth about it myself.'

'Do so; he will not deny what occurred.'

'I should like to know, sir, what your motive is in coming here and troubling me with these stories. If you hold one or two of the mortgages you ought not to regret the chance of having them paid off. Why do you seek to set me against the Marquess?'

'The woman he ran away with was my wife.' When Lazarus said this he rose. 'Now you understand why I put a spoke in his wheel! Is he to be happy, released from his cares, and I to be miserable, weighed down with trouble? Is he to have a wife and home, and children on his knees, and I to have a cold and solitary hearth?' Lazarus stood in the door. 'I have said my say. Act as you think best for the happiness of your child.'

He bowed and left the room. Mr. Rigsby laid his brow on the table, groaned, and said, 'I wish I were back in Ceylon!'

CHAPTER XXXII.

A DROP OF COMFORT.

MR. RIGSBY started from his seat, threw on his overcoat, pulled on his boots, took his hat and stick, and sallied forth. He had a vague hope of coming to some decision if he walked. He could come to none seated in his snugger. At one moment he flared up with anger and resentment, then he grew cold with apprehension. How would his dear Dulcina bear to be parted from the Marquess with whom she was so much in love? It would break her heart, which was as frail as her constitution. It would bring on an attack of jaundice. Strong emotion, a great shock, congested the liver; the breaking off of her engagement would certainly congest her liver. Would it be wise to prepare her for the news with calomel? He would consult a doctor. Podophyllin! since he had come to England he had been told that podophyllin touched the liver,

and was milder than calomel. He did not believe in podophyllin. He knew better ; as an old Indian he ought to know what the liver is, and what touches it. No podophyllin for him ; no, thank you. He had heard of a spectre who, when fired at, opened his hand and showed the bullets that had been innocuously discharged at him. His liver would, so to speak, open its hand and scoffingly roll back the podophyllin pills shot at it. But before calomel its powers would quail, it would shake in its shoes and beat a retreat. Still podophyllin might answer for Dulcina, whose liver was not as enlarged as his own. He would consult a doctor.

So he swung his stick and marched into Plymouth. ‘ Good heavens ! ’ he muttered. ‘ The rascal about to take my daughter for her money and then cast her aside, treat her with indifference and insult ! I won’t have it.’

When he came to the bridge leading to Plymouth, and halted to change a sovereign to pay the halfpenny toll, he was confronted by a gentleman in a light grey suit, with a white hat.

‘ Bless my soul ! ’ exclaimed the gentleman, ‘ Rigsby ! you here ? Let me lend you a halfpenny for old lang syne.’

Rigsby stared. 'What, Captain Ottley ! Never ! Very glad to see you.'

'A little louder, I am deaf of an ear, this confounded relaxing climate. The bands always find a difficulty with their drums, the parchment becomes limp in the Devonshire damp ; it is ditto with the drums of my ears. You must thump to be heard.'

'Come on the Hoe,' said Mr. Rigsby. 'It is a pleasure to meet an old Indian. So well preserved, too ! You look as young as ever.'

'Spirits does it,' answered Captain Ottley. 'I mean natural spirits. I have a cheerful disposition, which even the vapour-bath atmosphere of Devon don't damp. Take my arm, old boy. Lord bless me ! time flies ! It seems only the other day we met, and it must be five years ago. Brown and tanned you are with Oriental suns. Never mind, look at me. Autumn roses come blooming in my cheeks. This Devonshire climate is like a bath in Jordan. You go in sunburnt with all the blazes of India, and your flesh comes out as the flesh of a little child.'

'What are you doing here ?' asked Mr. Rigsby.

'Doing ! doing nothing. Nobody ever does

anything but talk in this enervating Devonshire climate. It relaxes everything, the moral stamina and the tongue. I eat lotus. I have come like Ulysses to the land of the lotus-eaters, where, according to the Laureate, it always seems afternoon. I lounge about on the seats of the Hoe, looking out at the Breakwater ; it always seems after dinner here.'

'Do you know many people?' asked the planter.

'Heaps—women mostly. They swarm here. Here in Plymouth there are very few others to know. You see their husbands and brothers are away at sea, or in the army abroad, and the place simply swarms with women.'

'Are you married?'

'Oh, dear me, no! I wouldn't be so well preserved if I were. I can't afford it. Besides, the climate is against it. You want more ozone in the air to stimulate the resolution to proposing point.'

'I should like to know your opinion upon podophyllin.'

'I beg your pardon.'

'Podophyllin,' shouted Rigsby ; he had lowered his voice to a confidential tone, forgetful of his friend's infirmity.

Captain Ottley stood still, put the silver head of his cane to his mouth, which he pursed, contracted his brows, and then shook his head. 'I don't think much of it,' he said. 'I've tried it; but I don't give my faith to it. Half-measures don't suit us old Indians. Give me calomel.'

'Calomel—ah!' The sun came out on both their faces, they laughed like children. 'Calomel, old boy!'

'Blue pill, old fellow, shake hands.' In their mutual enthusiasm they clasped fists.

'But it may do for women?' suggested Rigsby.

'*Virginibus puerisque*, yes,' answered Captain Ottley. 'Let us sit down here. One's limbs fail one in this damned Devonshire air.'

'Have you been long here?'

'Four or five years soaking in this steam, and expanding. It suits us Indians. We come here dry and shrivelled, and swell, taking in moisture at every pore.'

'Then you know about the country people, the nobility and so on?'

'Of course I do. I know everything about everybody.'

'Do you know the Kingsbridge family?'

'I can't say I do. I know of them; no one

meets them. I have a grievance. There was a superb ball at Court Royal the other day, and a special train full of officers went down. I was not invited. A plague upon them, say I. Why was not I invited? I am on half pay, was that the reason? I hear it was a splendid affair.'

'I was there,' said Mr. Rigsby. 'So was my daughter, Dulcina. Did you not see our names in the paper?'

'I may have done so, but did not notice them. Mine was not there, and that stirred my bile. Talking of bile, what do you drink, Rigsby?'

'I have been so long out of England that I cannot satiate myself on bottled ale.'

'You must not do it. Beer is bilious; fatal in this confounded climate, where the liver simply goes to sleep. You have to goad it to do its work. It is like Pickwick's fat boy. I don't approve of c'aret. Sherry is poison. Whisky and water is what I recommend.'

'We must talk of something else,' said the planter.

'Well, I suppose you are right, but somehow the liver is common ground on which all old Indians meet for a cosy gossip; old asperities are rubbed off, old grudges forgotten. It

is a sort of bond, binding us into brotherhood. Tear us away to other scenes and pastures new, sweep us along in the eddy of politics, or any other eddy you like to mention, we always come back to liver, touch ground there, and are thankful. We may differ in politics, religion, in pursuits, we are one in liver.'

'I should like a word with you in the strictest confidence.'

'Certainly, no one is here to overhear us. Remember; let whisky and water be your drink.—cold, and no sugar.'

Mr. Rigsby looked about him; no one was within earshot. 'We must not sit longer here,' he said, 'it is chilly; let us stroll up and down, and I will speak to you about my affairs, with the understanding that it goes no further.'

'Good heavens!' gasped Captain Ottley. 'Not money! Don't say you want to borrow money. My liver will not stand it. Anything but that!'

'I am abundantly well off,' said the planter. 'I am, I may say, in affluent circumstances. It is precisely my wealth which has drawn me into an affair from which I do not see my way out. By some fatality I have been brought into rather

intimate relations with the Duke of Kingsbridge and his family.'

'Does he want to borrow money? I have heard that his head is under water.'

'I knew his brother, Lord Edward Eveleigh, at college. I happened to be in Somersetshire, at Glastonbury, and I called on him. He and Lady Elizabeth were very kind, they invited me and my daughter to their house, and there we met Lord Saltcombe, the eldest—no, the only son of the Duke. He seemed to take a fancy to my child, and she, poor thing, completely lost her heart to him. Of course I gave my consent. I was proud to think that my *Dulcina* would be a marchioness, and eventually a duchess. One loves title; it is born in one, I suppose; it is a weakness, but it is a weakness common to the whole human race.'

'I congratulate you with all my heart. What can a father desire for his daughter better than the eight strawberry leaves?'

'But—I consented in all simplicity, believing that a ducal coronet was a rock on which sure prosperity could be built, and now I find——' He sighed, took off his hat, brushed his brow, and said, 'My dear Ottley, for God's sake tell me the truth about the family. Give me your

advice. I am so perplexed, I do not know what to do.'

'What am I to tell you? I have not my Peerage with me. I have it at home, and will lend it you, or we will put our heads together over it. The Marquess is here, in Plymouth, at the "Royal."'

'I know that. I want to know nothing that the Peerage can tell me. I have learned that by heart. I want to know about their circumstances.'

'Oh, they are dipped, but so is every respectable old family. Have you ever been at Saint Jean de Luz? There the bathers spend hours in the water, only their heads emerging, and take their meals and their naps bathing. I have seen the whole bay full of heads, and heads only. It is so with all the landed gentry—with most families of distinction—they are all under water, only their heads out, but they do not drown.'

'The Kingsbridge family are utterly ruined.'

'I do not believe that. It takes gigantic efforts to ruin a duke. The great nobility stick in the social jaw in spite of ache and decay; they are fast by four or five fangs. As for you or me, we are only one-fang people, out, and

our places taken by porcelain imitations, and no one cares. But your four and five-fanged people are different.'

'You do not think the Duke ruined?'

'I know nothing about him, more than that he lives quietly, never goes to town, and does good on all sides.'

'You think that he is not in overwhelming difficulties?'

'I should not suppose so, but I cannot tell.'

'There is one thing more. What do you know about the Marquess of Saltcombe, who is engaged to my daughter?'

'Not much either; of late nothing at all.'

'Of late? Did you hear much of him formerly?'

'I heard something.'

'What was it? I want to know.'

'Young men will be young men,' said Captain Ottley. 'It is not till their livers have grown that they become sedate and reliable. You may depend upon it, my dear old fellow, the liver is the fly-wheel of the system.'

'My daughter is engaged to the Marquess. I have heard a story about him which has made me very uneasy.'

'Fiddlesticks! I tell you what it is, Riggsby :

this cursed depressing Devonshire climate has begun to act on your liver and make it torpid. Why, bless my soul! any man out of Devonshire would be shrieking with delight at the prospect of marrying his daughter to a marquess, and here you are looking as blue over it as a calomel pill.'

'My daughter's happiness is dearer to me than life. Unless I am assured that she will be treated with kindness and respect, be made much of and valued, I shall not consent to the union. What I have heard affects the Marquess's moral character.'

'I heard something about him when first I came to Plymouth. He had been wild and extravagant, and had run away with a Jewess.'

'The wife of another.'

'Yes, I remember that. But all that is past, and he has been sober since; not a scandal about him for many years. Besides, consider the temptations which beset a young man here, and that young man the heir to a dukedom. Unless he had a very old head on young shoulders he would be certain to get into a scrape. You must not make too much of this old scandal. It is with the dead. I dare say

there are incidents in your past which you are thankful are buried.'

'I do not know any,' said Mr. Rigsby. 'I have always been steady. You see I have made a fortune. That is the seal of approval heaven has set on my conduct. Always respectable, always. That is why I have no sympathy with a man who has sown his wild oats. I never sowed anything but coffee.'

'How have you come to hear this now?'

Mr. Rigsby told his friend of the visit of Lazarus.

'Lazarus,' exclaimed Captain Ottley, and pulled a long face. 'Confound the man, he has his fingers in every pie and pocket. He has even dipped into mine.'

'What is to be done?' asked Mr. Rigsby.

'Nothing,' answered Captain Ottley. 'Let matters take their course. Things are never as black as they are painted. The Jew exaggerated the financial condition of the family. He does not want to have the mortgage paid because the investment is too profitable for him to care to lose it. Do not excite yourself about the Marquess, either. I have always heard that he is a man of honour, and if he did transgress once, it was for the only and the last time.'

The Captain succeeded in calming Rigsby's agitation. The planter began to hope that matters had been presented to him in a worse aspect than they really were. He was resolved to question Lord Saltcombe on them, on both, and to hear the truth from him. The Marquess was expected to dinner that evening. Scarce a day passed without his visiting the house, and driving or walking with his betrothed. This day he did not call, nor did he appear at dinner. Mr. Rigsby became uneasy. He rose early from his wine, lit a cigar, and walked into Plymouth to inquire after the Marquess.

He was told that Lord Saltcombe was at home, but not well, and desired that he might not be disturbed. Mr. Rigsby was dissatisfied with the answer. He sent up his name, and asked if he might see the Marquess for a moment. Then only was he shown to his room. He found him seated in his arm-chair, without a light.

'Shall I bring candles, my lord?' asked the servant.

'Thank you.—Sit down, Mr. Rigsby. I am out of sorts.'

When the candles came in, Rigsby saw that his face was deadly pale, his eyes sunken and bright.

‘You desired to see me particularly?’ he asked.

‘Yes; but you seem hardly well enough for what I wish to discuss.’

‘I also wanted to see you. I must speak openly with you,’ said the Marquess.

‘My dear Saltcombe,’ said Mr. Rigsby, ‘I am a blunt man, and I ask questions in a blunt way. You must excuse me.’

The Marquess bowed.

‘You must understand that what I live for is the happiness of my daughter. I have toiled for her. My fortune is hers, and I am desirous that it should be secured to her, to be inalienably hers. Again, I would not have her marry anyone, however high his position in the social scale, unless I were sure that he would love her.’

‘Do not distress yourself,’ said the Marquess quietly. ‘I will spare you the pain of asking questions. You are quite right in desiring to secure the happiness of your daughter. I obeyed the wishes of my family, and proposed to Miss Rigsby, satisfied in my mind that, having taken on me sacred responsibilities, I should honourably fulfil them. Of this you may be certain: if Miss Rigsby become my wife, never

will I show her the slightest want of courtesy and deference.'

'She must have more than that. Do you love her?'

'Mr. Rigsby,' said the Marquess, 'I do not press my pretensions to your daughter's hand. I tell you that I am resolved to do my duty; there is no other living woman who has any share in my affections, always excepting my sister.'

The planter was uneasy. He did not know how to approach the delicate questions he wanted to put. He fumbled with his hat and grew dark red in the face.

'I beg your pardon, Saltcombe,' he said, 'if I touch on subjects that are tender. I am very much shocked—very, so is Dulcina, by the dreadful incident at the theatre. I thought at the time you seemed overcome. I was not then aware of the—of the——'

Lord Saltcombe could hardly become paler than he was before, but the shadows in his face became deeper. He rose from his chair, and said with the greatest composure, 'Mr. Rigsby, I will not require you to continue. If you doubt me, we had better part. I am returning to Court Royal. Pray excuse the abruptness

of my departure to Miss Rigsby and Miss Stokes. I offer them the humblest apologies.'

Mr. Rigsby could hardly believe his ears. He was still sitting. He got up without his hat, then stooped, picked it up, let it fall, and picked it up again. Instead of taking his future son-in-law to task, he was being shown the door with cool politeness. The Marquess was proud and dignified; he shook Dulcina off as if she were not worth having. Mr. Rigsby had not intended to quarrel with the Marquess, he had desired the allaying of his own anxieties. A word of regret for past follies, an assurance that the fortunes of the family were not completely wrecked, would have sufficed. He believed that Dulcina was so much in love with Lord Saltcombe that a disappointment would half kill her. He was ready to meet the Marquess half-way, to accept an assurance of repentance, and to pay off one or two of the mortgages at once, and secure the rest of his property to his daughter.

But Lord Saltcombe would make no advance. He took umbrage at the implied suspicions. Father and daughter must accept him on his own terms, or not at all.

'Am I to understand,' said he, 'that you

refuse to give me any explanations as to your conduct with regard to that actress, and to relieve my mind with reference to the embarrassments of the Duke?’

Lord Saltcombe bowed.

‘Then I suppose your engagement to my daughter is at an end?’

‘I allow no liberties to be taken with me,’ said Lord Saltcombe. ‘I have rung for a cab.’

When Mr. Rigsby was out of the hotel, driving home to Stoke, ‘Lord bless me!’ he exclaimed, ‘how testy these aristocrats are! Impracticable people. Time the country were rid of them. I wish I were back in Ceylon!’

CHAPTER XXXIII.

BROKEN OFF.

ON reaching home, Mr. Rigsby told his man to ask Miss Stokes to do him the civility of speaking with him in the study.

Miss Stokes came sailing in with great dignity, wondering what Mr. Rigsby could want to say to her at that time of the evening in private. Sisters-in-law cannot be kept for ever in the cold, she argued with herself.

‘Would you mind shutting the door behind you?’ asked Mr. Rigsby, as Miss Stokes had left it modestly ajar, and stood near it herself.

‘Please come nearer. I have something I want very particularly to say to you.’

‘I am at your service, James,’ said Miss Stokes, shutting the door and advancing one step.

‘My dear Eliza,’ began the planter, standing on the hearth with his back to the fire, ‘the

matter I wish to speak to you upon is a delicate one ; between you and me, a very delicate one.'

'Indeed, James!'

'I have been a widower for some years.'

'Oh, James, you have, you have!'

'And I have had only my daughter to solace me in my loneliness. And now that daughter——'

'Is about to be translated to a loftier sphere.'

'In matters of the heart, Eliza—in matters of the heart—I mean—I am confused. I have had much to think of. I did not intend to speak now, but I thought it best to do so to-night instead of delaying longer.' Miss Stokes looked down. 'Won't you take a chair, my dear Eliza?' She gracefully sank into one near the table. 'You have been so good and devoted to Dulcina, my dear Eliza, that I have considered I could not do better than take you——ahem?—take you——'

'Oh, James! I never, never dreamed of the happiness.'

'Take you into confidence before breaking the news to Dulcina. How she will bear it I tremble to think.'

'Do not tremble, dear James. She is cordially attached to me, I may say she regards

me—she has regarded me, though our respective ages hardly admit it, as a second mother.’

‘Then I can trust you to break the painful news to her, can I not?’

‘Not painful—do not say painful, James.’

‘Indeed, I hope and trust it will not be painful, but I greatly fear. Such deception, such heartlessness.’

‘What deception? What heartlessness, James? Not on my side; I have been all frankness—too much heart.’

‘I have been horribly deceived. It is all up with the engagement.’

‘Up! which engagement?’

‘Which? There has been only one. Dulcina must forget Lord Saltcombe.’

‘What—what?’ exclaimed Miss Stokes, pushing her chair back and looking blank. ‘I thought, James—but never mind what I thought.’

‘If you thought anything else you thought wrong,’ said he. ‘It is all up with the engagement. We have been grossly imposed upon. The Marquess was hunting Dulcina for her money; the family of the Duke are in desperate straits, and at any moment the creditors may

be down on them, turn them out of Court Royal and sell house and lands.'

Miss Stokes stared.

'They were reckoning on paying their debts with my money—a pack of coroneted beggars! Lord Saltcombe does not care a snap of the fingers for Dulcina—he wanted only her money, and then when he had got that he would have deserted her. Bless my soul! Did I plant coffee, and slave for all these years away from my native land, sacrificing my life and disorganising my liver, to find money for a parcel of needy noblemen? Am I to send my dear Dulcina among wolves, who will tear from her the flesh and leave only the bones?'

'This is not possible, James.'

'It not only is possible, but it is so. I charged Lord Saltcombe with the beggarly trick to his face, and he was unable to answer me. He slunk from my presence like a whipped dog. Now, Eliza, how do you think my darling will bear the disappointment?'

'My dear James, you need not fear. That sweet Dulcina possesses so sound a judgment and so cool a head that I am sure, when all the circumstances have been placed before her, she will bear the loss like a martyr.'

‘My poor dear ! like a martyr. O my child ! my child !’

‘Do not be uneasy, James. I exercise great influence over Dulcina. I will break to her the news you have so graciously favoured me with. Perhaps you will talk to her yourself about it to-morrow, after breakfast.’

‘I fear it will be a cruel disappointment.’

‘Disappointments meet us poor women wherever we tread,’ said Miss Stokes, with a sigh.

Next day at breakfast Mr. Rigsby was uncomfortable. He had not slept much, troubled with the thought of the distressing duty awaiting execution. At breakfast he crumbled his toast, upset his egg, and dawdled over his coffee. Dulcina looked limp and lachrymose.

When breakfast was over Miss Stokes went into the conservatory, so as to be out of hearing, yet near at hand. The time had arrived for the dreaded disclosure. How much had Miss Stokes already told Dulcina ? The father wished he knew.

‘Come and sit by me on the sofa, darling child,’ he said. ‘You are not looking well, I am sure you have been suffering. And now I

have to increase your trouble by speaking on a most unsatisfactory subject.' He looked round at his daughter. Her face expressed no emotion. 'I am not a father who would stand in the way if his child desired something very much ; the happiness of you, *Dulcina*, is paramount to every consideration. I do not know to what extent your affections have been engaged, whether your heart would break should Lord Saltcombe not—not—excuse the expression—come to the scratch. I have favoured your acquaintance with him because I have believed him an admirable match. But, my dear, all is not gold that glitters. It is, as the Latin grammar tells us, human to err. I have learned circumstances which have altered my view of Lord Saltcombe's character, and made me doubt whether the engagement is to your advantage. I am a plain business man, and I look to the business side of everything. I have made inquiries, and my inquiries have dissatisfied me. The connection with the Kingsbridge family, the title, the position, that seemed so splendid that I was dazzled. But there are spots in the sun, craters in the moon, blots on ducal escutcheons.'

Miss Rigsby became uneasy ; she looked at

her father, then at the breakfast-table, then on the floor.

‘I have learned, to my surprise, that the Kingsbridge family are bankrupt; they are living on the very verge of ruin. Only the hesitation of their creditors saves from a fall which will be a scandal throughout England.’

‘Papa! I cannot think it.’

‘I assure you, my darling, it is true. I have seen the list of mortgages. I know precisely the condition of their affairs. They are in the hands of the Jews. You saw the splendour in which they live. That is all paid for out of other people’s money. They put on a glittering mask to cover ruin. The Marquess is penniless. If you marry him he will look to you for his pocket-money, for cigars, and tailor’s bill—go to you whenever he wants a new pair of boots or a handkerchief. It is true you will receive his title, but in return you will maintain him like a poor relation.’

Mr. Rigsby kept his eyes fixed on his daughter whilst he spoke. He was afraid of her fainting, and he was ready to call Miss Stokes to his aid. But Dulcina listened to him with composure; she bit her lip and frowned, and

ripped the binding of a cushion on the sofa, but said nothing.

‘A handsome sum which I was prepared to pay over on your marriage would have gone at once to the Jews, to stop their greedy jaws and stave off the fall of the house. The Duke, the Marquess, Lord Ronald, and Lord Edward are calculating on my death, when they may use up the whole of my—that is, your fortune in washing clean the family estates. What those estates are likely to be worth in a few years, with bad seasons, and American corn and frozen meat coming in on all sides, I cannot say. I suppose about two per cent. You have now five or six on your capital. If your money goes into the land you are likely to lose half your income.’

He was silent. Presently Miss Rigsby said, ‘Did they tell you this?’

‘Bless my soul, no! The fine thing is that they are all so cavalier in their aristocratic ideas, that they regard the marriage of Saltcombe with you as a great condescension on their part. They will pocket your money and tolerate you.’

‘Then they wanted to swindle us?’ said Dulcina.

‘I wouldn’t call it exactly a swindle. I believe they are far too grand to go into

accounts. I dare say they do not know their desperate situation, but have a vague idea that they must have money to make them comfortable, and as you have money they will take you for the sake of your gold.'

Dulcina's lips became pasty. She drew them together, and her hard eyes glittered like steel beads in the sun.

'Lord Saltcombe has never shown me much love. He has been civil, that is all. But Aunt Eliza said that in high society great people loved stiffly. It was against etiquette to be ardent.'

'Lord Saltcombe has not loved you. I asked him point blank if he did, only last night, and he could not say he did.'

'Lord Saltcombe has not loved me!' exclaimed Dulcina, with a vicious flash in her face. 'Do you mean to tell me he has not cared for *me*—that he has not admired *me*—that he has not courted *me*—that he has been peering into my pocket instead of my face all this while, thinking of my money, not of myself?'

'It is so.'

'Then I will have nothing to do with him.' Instead of Dulcina fainting the tears sprang to

her eyes, tears of offended vanity, not of pain. 'I'll have it out with Aunt Eliza, I will; she vowed he was frantic with love, and hardly knew how to control his passion. Oh, what a liar she is!'

CHAPTER XXXIV.

INCURABLES.

AT Court Royal everything had settled down to the ordinary routine after the Rigsbys had gone. The Duke was glad that the stir was over, he liked to be quiet. Lord Edward had returned to his living in Somersetshire, to relieve the exemplary curate in the labour of blowing bubbles, and insisting on the *via media* as the way of salvation. Lord Ronald resumed his early walks and his simple amusements. He had a turning lathe at which he took exercise on rainy days, and turned out hideous wooden candlesticks and boxes covered with spirals. Of late he had taken to turning flower-pot stands for all his friends, stands that started and split and had to be thrown away after having been in use a week. His grandest achievement was hat-stands, frightful objects that stood six feet high, and bristled with sticks ending in knobs.

These hat-stands were to be seen and were sold at all bazaars in the neighbourhood, and were bought by people out of consideration for the General—it would hurt his feelings, it was thought, if his hat-stands remained undisposed of. Every door leading to the open air in Court Royal, every bedroom, was provided with one of these erections. In the rooms they were serviceable, he argued, for ladies to hang their gowns on, for gentlemen to suspend their coats.

Lady Grace had one, of course, in her room, and used it with great conscientiousness. ‘It is not pretty,’ she said to Lucy, ‘but it is well-intentioned. It must be good—dear Uncle Ronald made it. Things get rather dusty on it, though.’

‘Do you not think, dear, that if chintz were hung round it like a tent, the ugliness might be disguised, and the dust kept off?’

Acting on Lucy’s suggestion the hat-stand was enclosed in a structure designed and executed for it by the General himself, who turned the head and turned the foot, and tacked the chintz on it himself. Then Lady Grace took his grey head between her hands and kissed both his cheeks.

‘That,’ said Lord Ronald, ‘is over-payment.’

Lord Ronald was vigorously engaged at his lathe turning two such hat and cloak stands out of rosewood, as a present for his nephew on his marriage. Each required twelve knobs for the bristles and four knobs for the feet, and a big knob for the top, seventeen knobs in all; two stands, therefore, demanded thirty-four knobs. Lord Ronald had turned nineteen, which were ranged on the floor in strict order like cannon balls; he was engaged on knob number twenty when he heard a tap at the door, and, before he could answer, in came Mr. Worthivale, hot and frightened looking.

‘What is the matter, Worthivale? Is Court Royal a-fire?’

‘Oh, my lord, what is to be done? We are in a worse predicament than ever.’

‘It would be difficult to reach that.’

‘Really,’ exclaimed the excited steward, ‘I am driven wild. Has any news come from the Marquess? When will the marriage take place?’

‘I do not think the day is fixed.’

‘Has he written?’

‘He wrote once after reaching Plymouth. I have not seen the Duke this morning, so I cannot say whether his Grace has received a letter

to-day. It is all right, don't alarm yourself. The wedding must not be pressed on too hastily. My niece has had a note or two from Miss Rigsby, but they contained no news.'

'I wish the wedding were to take place at once. I do not see how we are to hold on much longer without it.'

'What is the matter now?'

'The creditors and mortgagees are unreasonable. The Court Royal and Kingsbridge mortgages held by Mr. Emmanuel are called in. He will file a bill against us. We cannot possibly meet the call. It is as much as we can do to meet current expenses. Where are we to raise a penny? Bless my heart,' said the steward, throwing himself into a chair, 'here we were so happy and content, with the prospect before us of getting everything squared at our leisure, the Marquess marrying, and the more pressing calls stilled, when down on our heads comes this thunderbolt. File a bill against us in Chancery! Merciful heavens! What is the world coming to, with Radicalism, and democracy, and socialism, and American competition, cutting the throats of our farmers, and Fenian plots, and Nihilist desperadoes—and actually a request from Farmer Thomas to build him a silo that

will contain sixty tons of ensilage. Why, my lord, it can't be done under three to four hundred pounds, even if we use galvanised iron for the roof. Where are the four hundred pounds to come from at the present moment, I should like to know? I have said we will think of it after the Marquess is married.'

'Who has threatened a bill in Chancery?'

'Crudge—Crudge, solicitor. He acts, apparently, for all those holding our mortgages. It is a plot, a wicked plot as desperate as any devised by Fenians.'

'Do not alarm yourself, Worthivale. The people have heard that Saltcombe is going to be married, and they are putting in their claims so as to be sure of their money.'

'But we must pay. The time is limited—three months—six months. Before a certain day the money must be forthcoming.'

'Well, Saltcombe will be married before that, and then he can easily get help from old Rigsby. There is no occasion for alarm. For heaven's sake don't rush in on the Duke in the way you tumbled in upon me. Don't frighten him. He has no idea of the state of affairs. He is under the impression that a great deal of money has been saved by the quiet life we have

been leading here for the last seven or eight years.'

'No money whatever has been saved. Before that the family was in a galloping consumption, now it is suffering from slow paralysis. When the Duke went to town every year the outlay was enormous, and debts accumulated annually at a rate that makes my head spin. Now we live up to our income—that is, to an income unburdened on every shoulder and joint of the spine. There is nothing saved. You cannot save on a deficit.'

'Well, whatever you do, take care not to trouble his Grace. He cannot bear it.'

'But, my lord, what am I to do?'

'Nothing; wait, and keep your counsel. Let the marriage take place, and all will be right. I'll manage matters with Mr. Rigsby.'

'But,' said the steward—'you will excuse the question—does Mr. Rigsby know the state of affairs?'

'I believe a word was said about some money being forthcoming at the marriage. I can't say that he was told everything. I did not have much talk with him. He saw a good deal of the Duke, but then the Duke knows nothing about this unfortunate matter. Leave

the affair to arrange itself. If you like I will write to Saltcombe to press on the marriage.'

The confidence of the General partly reassured Mr. Worthivale.

'You think, then, that we need not be anxious?'

'Not in the least. I will manage matters with Rigsby. The old fellow will be flattered and proud to let us have the money. What are the mortgages called in?'

'All—all without exception. What can have taken the people I cannot conceive; what can they all want their money for simultaneously? It looks like a plot. If only two or three had given notice I should not have minded, but all—and all together! I cannot get over it. And Crudge acting for the lot—that is strange, is it not?'

'Well, never mind,' answered the General; 'we know the worst. It is best to swallow a pill whole, not to take it in bits.'

'But what is the sum to be paid over with Miss Rigsby? Will it suffice?'

'No matter if it does not. It will stop a gap. I tell you the old fellow will be pleased to be asked to let us have the money we want. Those sort of people are flattered by having

favours asked of them. Besides, it will be for his own daughter. He cannot refuse. I will make it all right with him.'

'If I may offer a suggestion, my lord, I would propose that you should see Mr. Rigsby at once. It is true we have been remiss about the payment of interest on the mortgages, and that may have frightened the holders. If we could pay off one or two at once it might allay the alarm of the rest, and they could be brought to withdraw their demands.'

'There is three months' grace,' said Lord Ronald—'plenty of time. Put the matter in the hands of our solicitor, let him write to this Crudge.'

'No solicitor in the world can save us. We must have money.'

'It really is too bad!' exclaimed Lord Ronald, losing his temper. 'It is your fault, Worthivale. You should not have allowed things to come to this pass. You have had the management of the estates; they are extensive. You should have drawn the purse-strings tighter.'

'My lord,' said the steward, hurt, 'I beg you to remember that I have preached retrenchment to deaf ears.'

‘We have retrenched. We no longer go to town.’

‘That was not enough.’

‘Good heaven! What would you have had us do, then?’

‘Could not his Grace have gone abroad and shut up the Court?’

‘Gone abroad!—to Boulogne, and herded with all the clipped and pinched wretches who hover there, like the spirits on the banks of Lethe, unable to come over because short of an obolus. No, thank you. There are limits below which we cannot descend.’

‘What is to be done? Nothing can be done now. It is too late. Some years ago—perhaps. Now all is hopeless.’

‘This is rank nonsense. Mr. Rigsby is rolling in money.’

‘But can we be sure of getting him to apply it to our necessity?’

‘Of course we can. I know we can.’

‘What is he worth? We want a very large sum.’

‘I do not know his income. Be at ease. He has plenty.’

Mr. Worthivale put his hands to his head. ‘If it were not wicked and cowardly,’ he said, ‘I would blow out my brains.’

‘If there is immediate pressure,’ said the General, ‘I will write to Edward—to Lord Edward; he is canon and archdeacon, and proctor in Convocation, and enjoys a fat rectory. I have no doubt he will help.’

‘He has helped us already.’

‘When? How?’

‘Over and over again, but he wished me not to mention it to any of the family.’

‘Bless my soul!’ exclaimed Lord Ronald, ‘I had no idea of that. Can I sell my interest in anything—my annuity?’

‘If you sell your annuity, my lord, it must be paid, and now it is not.’

‘I can sell my half-pay of General.’

‘A drop into a bottomless gulf.’

‘Then we must wait in patience for the marriage-bells. Now—not another word. I am going to the Duke.’

The steward sighed and withdrew.

‘Stay a moment,’ called the General as he was passing through the door. ‘I hope, I trust, not a word of this has reached the ears of Lady Grace. I do suppose that you have not spoken of these painful matters to Lucy.’

‘She does know something,’ said Mr. Worthivale.

‘Who? Lucy or Grace?’

‘Lucy has been told that no unnecessary expense must be incurred. Remember she manages the housekeeping, and has the accounts in her charge. But, as she says, it is impossible to keep down the enormous outlay. The servants think it their duty to blaze abroad the splendour of the house by lavish waste. The requirements of the establishment are very great.’

‘I do hope Lucy will not by hint even let Grace suppose that there is trouble in the air.’

‘Rely on her.’

‘Then no one need know of this confounded worry except myself and Saltcombe. There, there, be of good cheer, the cloud is passing.’

Lord Ronald went to the Duke’s apartments. He found his brother disturbed, his face was wanting in its wonted serenity.

‘Ronald,’ said the Duke, ‘no letter again this morning from that provoking boy. I cannot understand it. In my day no son would have dreamed of leaving his father without notice of his proceedings. Can it be that love has turned his head? If so, the sooner he is married and brought to a sober mind and sense of his obligations, the better.’

‘You see, brother,’ said the General, ‘ladies

are exacting. No doubt Miss Dulcina is not happy without Herbert about her, and love-making is one of the labours of Hercules. When he comes home he is fagged, and fain to throw himself in a chair and go to sleep. Take my word for it—that is it. Miss Rigsby has only written twice to Grace, once a line of thanks for her reception here, the other a mere half-page of nothing, that took her one minute by the clock to write.’

‘Nothing can excuse neglect of duty to a parent,’ said the Duke. ‘When I was young I was taught to discharge duty first, and take pleasure after. The spirit of this age is other; duties are blown away as feathered seeds, and only pleasure is regarded. I thought better of Herbert.’

‘My dear Duke, you must excuse him. Love-making demoralises a man. It is like an election, it upsets everything. No doubt, now that Saltcombe has emerged from his chrysalis, he is flying about.’

‘It would not take him ten minutes to write me a line. I am not exacting. I do not require four sides crossed, but I expect the recognition of what is due from a son to a father. I am put out.’

Lord Ronald had nothing to say to this.

‘Hitherto,’ continued the Duke, ‘I have had no reason to complain of Herbert; he has been a respectful, obedient son. He was extravagant some years ago, and I have no doubt spent more money than was judicious, but it runs in the family. I was extravagant at one time; my father—as you may remember, Ronald—never stopped to consider what a thing cost if it took his fancy; and my grandfather went to extremes in munificence. I should have been pained to see a mean, calculating spirit in Herbert. A gentleman must be openhanded.’

‘He has lived too quietly for some years. I am glad to see our comet run into sunlight again.’

‘Yes. Because I am too poorly to take my proper place in society, that is no reason why Saltcombe should live as a hermit. I shall insist, when he is married, on his being in town for the season.’

‘His wife will take care of that.’

‘I trust she will. I have been considering that he must have a residence of his own.’

‘Will he not live here?’

‘Certainly not. I should like it, but it would hardly do. The Marquess and Marchio-

ness must have their own country house, with no divided authority in it. I would not have Grace the guest of my daughter-in-law, nor my daughter-in-law the guest of Grace in Court Royal. No, Ronald, I have been thinking of Fowelscombe. The house is out of repair, but it is a fine place. The grounds are delightful, that glorious drive down through an avenue of beeches for over a mile, and then the charming old house below, nestling among trees—what can be more suitable for the young couple? The house has been uninhabited for so long, and the grounds so neglected, that it will want a great deal doing to it. Still, some ten thousand pounds spent judiciously would make it comfortable.’

‘I am sure that Saltcombe would not wish it.’

‘Ronald,’ said the Duke, with some indignation, ‘unless the poisonous spirit of the age has infected Saltcombe more deeply than I anticipate, he will approve of whatever I ordain. I have written to an architect to examine and report on the condition of Fowelscombe, and I have requested a distinguished landscape gardener to look over the grounds and suggest improvements.’

‘But—my dear Duke.’

‘There is no *but* in the case—that is, no but is admissible. I wish it. That suffices.’

Lord Ronald looked down at his boots.

‘There is another thing,’ continued the Duke, ‘I wished to consult you about. I hear that the Revelstoke estates of the Stretchleighs are to be sold. Our great-grandmother was a Stretchleigh, and it is unendurable to me to think that some brewer, or builder, or successful army tailor should come down and buy the property, and inhabit the house once the home of gentlemen. I am thinking of buying it.’

‘Merciful powers!’ exclaimed Lord Ronald.

‘Why do you exclaim in this way? Is there anything exaggerated in this sentiment of respect for the home of our ancestors on the female side? Surely, Ronald, you are not touched with the utilitarian spirit of the age?’

‘But—where is the money to come from?’

‘Money can always be found for what is needful.’

‘But this is hardly a necessity, brother.’

‘Not a necessity, exactly, but almost a duty. All the country is invaded by rich tradesmen, and engineers who have been knighted for building bridges, and manufacturers out of the North.

Our old country gentry are becoming extinct. I do my best to keep our neighbourhood select. There is no knowing what mischief a new man might do coming into our proximity. He would flood the country with nineteenth-century ideas, and subvert our tenants.'

'Have you spoken to Worthivale about this?'

'Not yet. I saw no need. He would combat it, of course. He is a good man, but narrow ; pettifogging in his ideas, no breadth of view, always after reduction of outlay ; never disposed to deal liberally with the tenants.'

'You have taken no step in the matter, I trust?'

'I cannot say that I have taken *no* step, but I have not yet bought the property. I have opened negotiations.'

'Do nothing, I entreat you—do nothing till after the marriage.'

'It may then be too late. The property may have passed into most objectionable hands.'

'Consult Saltcombe. Consult Edward. For heaven's sake move no further without consideration.'

'I have considered. You are very strange this morning, Ronald. I do not understand your manner or your mood.'

‘I am out of sorts. I am bewildered. Spend ten thousand on Fowelscombe and buy Revelstoke. Lord bless me!’ He recovered his composure. ‘Excuse me, Duke, you take me by surprise. Do nothing till I have had another talk with you about it.’

‘My dear Ronald, what does it concern you whether I buy Revelstoke or not? I am buying to suit my own notions, and, though I value your opinions, I am not bound to submit to them. Now I really must attack my letters. I will detain you no longer. My conscience reproaches me for having taken up so much of your precious time; pray return to your turning of knobs.’

CHAPTER XXXV.

A CARD CASTLE.

LORD RONALD returned to his room and spent the rest of the day in turning. The days were short, and he made the most of the little light. His hand wanted its usual steadiness, or his mind wandered to other matters; for he spoiled several of the knobs he worked at that afternoon.

He was engaged on the twenty-sixth in the gathering dusk when he heard a step behind him, and looked round. 'Mercy on me!' he exclaimed, and cut into and spoiled the twenty-sixth knob. 'What is the meaning of this?'

He saw the Marquess before him, worn, white, hollow-eyed. 'Good heavens, Saltcombe! How come you here? What has happened? What is the matter with you? Have you been ill?'

'Do not overwhelm me with questions, uncle,' answered Lord Saltcombe. 'I can answer but one at a time.'

‘ But this is amazing. Why have you not written? What do you mean by dropping on one from the sky without warning?’

‘ There, uncle, leave the lathe. I want a word with you. I have matters of importance to communicate. Come out of your workshop into the other room.’

‘ I am at your service. Merciful powers! what a pack of troubles and bewilderments come upon one all at once! First, Worthivale bursts in on me, then the Duke drops down on me, and now you spring on me like a ghost—my senses are stupefied or scared away. No bad news, I hope? Take that chair by the fire. How pale, how ill you look! Tell me the truth, Herbert, have you been sick?’

Lord Saltcombe shook his head.

‘ Your father is put out at your not writing. I thought that sickness might account for the neglect.’

‘ I have not been ill.’

‘ Then why have you not written? I found the Duke this morning in a tantrum about it. He will call you sharply to task. What have you been doing with yourself?’

‘ I am sorry if I have given my father pain. I would spare him every annoyance. What I

have to communicate now is likely to disturb him. Miss Rigsby and I have not succeeded in liking each other more, the more we have seen of each other.'

'What? How? You don't mean to say ——you! ——you surely are not going to tell me——'

'That the engagement is at an end.'

Lord Ronald started. 'At an end! Herbert, you are out of your senses, or I am dreaming.'

'It is true. The engagement has been broken off. Mr. Rigsby must have picked up exaggerated reports of the state of our pecuniary affairs, and he began impertinently to catechise me about them. I could do no other than refuse to answer his questions.'

The General clasped his hands on his knees, wrung them, and groaned. 'Saltcombe! do you know that we have been building on your marriage? Do you know that without it we are hopelessly lost? Your marriage was the one cord to which we clung. That gone, we sink. There is no salvation anywhere.'

'I know it,' answered the Marquess gloomily. 'I know more than that. We drag others who have trusted us into ruin along with us. But it cannot be helped. I have done my

utmost. I am not to blame—not in this matter, at least. I did what was required of me. I constrained myself to be civil and play the lover to a girl I could not like, to one with whom I could not associate with any pleasure. I proposed to her. I never betrayed my feelings by a look, a gesture, or a word. I was prepared to make her my wife, and when she was my wife you may rely on me I would have failed in no duty towards her. But I could not endure to be treated with impertinence—not by such as Rigsby.’

‘Rigsby treat you with impertinence! It is inconceivable, you have misunderstood him. I will go post-haste to Plymouth and explain matters, and effect a reconciliation. You must marry the girl, you must.’

‘I cannot do so. Mr. Rigsby does not wish it. He has been frightened by gossip about our difficulties, and he thinks we will involve him and throw away his daughter’s fortune.’

‘But he ought to be proud, happy to contribute——’

‘Perhaps he ought, but he is not. On the contrary, he declines the honour.’

‘Heaven help us, we are lost! Do you know, Saltcombe, that some of the mortgages

are called up, and unless we find the money we shall be compelled to sell? It is too dreadful !'

'I have done what I could. To bear to be taken to task by that Mr. Rigsby exceeded my endurance.'

'Did you break with him, or he with you?'

'He came to me, as I believe, with the express purpose of bringing about a rupture. He charged us with being ruined, and wanting to stave off ruin with his money.'

'That is true.'

'It may be true, but it is impertinence to say it.'

'So you flared up and upset the salt?'

'I declined to be cross-questioned.'

'What is to be done about conveying this news to the Duke? It must be done gently, lest it excite him and affect his heart.'

'If you think best, uncle, that I should take all the blame on myself, I will do so. Let my father suppose me capricious, he will be annoyed, but it will pass. He did not look cordially on this engagement. He did not care for the connection. If he thinks that the planter broke it off his pride will be hurt, he will feel

it as an insult, and that will agitate him profoundly. No ; best let me bear the blame.'

Lord Ronald put his hand to his head. He was too bewildered to think ; he looked at the Marquess, then at the fire, almost stupidly. Both were silent for some time.

'I came in quietly, without being observed,' said Lord Saltcombe. 'I wished to have a word with you before I saw anyone else. I had rather not meet Grace to-night.'

'The Duke must be prepared for this. You have shaken me. I cannot collect my thoughts. We must telegraph for the Archdeacon. We shall want his advice. What a card castle we have been erecting, Saltcombe ! and now with a puff it is down in ruins.'

'I will go and sleep at the lodge. Beavis will give me a shakedown. I do not wish to meet Grace till I am more composed, and I do not want the news of my return to be carried to my father till you have prepared him.'

'What am I to say ? What can I say ?'

'Tell him that you have heard unpleasant tidings from Plymouth, and that you expect me to be back to-morrow.'

'I will do so. Good heavens, Saltcombe ! will you believe it ? the Duke, in sublime un-

consciousness, is planning the outlay of ten thousand pounds on Fowelscombe and the purchase of Revelstoke. The only possible good I see in your return is that it will render the outlay on Fowelscombe unnecessary, and you must dissuade him from buying an acre at Revelstoke. There is no money—not one penny; and the mortgages on Court Royal and Kingsbridge are called up. What are we to do? Now go quietly and get Beavis to telegraph to the Archdeacon. My head is not clear enough in this whirl. He is a business man, and always knows what should be done.'

He paced the room. 'There is the first bell,' he said; 'I must dress for dinner. I will do what I can to prepare the Duke. Merciful powers! how much is demanded of me! I would rather command in an engagement with Afghans.'

When Lord Saltcombe had gone he dressed hastily, but was late when he came down. The second bell had rung. The Duke disliked unpunctuality. The General had never failed in this particular before.

'Why, Ronald,' he said, 'is the weather going to change? Are the heavens about to fall, that you come lagging after the time? Will

you give your arm to Grace? I take in my little friend Lucy. What a small party we are! How is it the vicar and Mrs. Townley have not been invited, or Beavis, or the Sheepwashes, or some one? I dislike an empty table. Now Saltcombe is away the party is reduced so low that conversation flags. With the best intentions and the most brilliant wits we must suffer from exhaustion of topics. Grace, have you heard from that tiresome brother of yours who is too enamoured to write?’

The brilliantly lighted dining-room, the fire of oak on the hearth burning merrily, the glittering silver and glass on the table, the flowers that adorned it, yellow alamandas and maiden-hair fern laid on the white cloth; the buff and scarlet footmen—the general brightness, comfort, beauty, struck the General as it had never struck him before, conscious as he was of the desperate situation of affairs. He was out of spirits. He had not dressed with his usual care, his tie was twisted, one of his cuffs was *minus* a stud, and slipped over his hand. The Duke observed his troubled looks, but said nothing. He thought he had been too short with his brother in the forenoon, and regretted it. This, no doubt, was distressing Lord Ronald. Lady

Grace was always quiet ; she could talk pleasantly, but lacked the power of originating and keeping up a conversation. Lucy threw herself into the gap ; she was skilful to maintain a conversation, and give it a fillip when it flagged. An invaluable person at table when spirits were low.

‘ You good little maid,’ said the Duke, ‘ you are to me an unfailing source of admiration. Always lively, with your dark eyes sparkling, and your fresh cheek blooming, and your tongue never lacking a happy speech.’

‘ It could not be otherwise, your Grace, when you are always flattering,’ said Lucy.

When Lady Grace and Miss Worthivale retired the Duke passed the port to his brother. ‘ You never touch claret, I think?’ Then, noticing that Lord Ronald’s hand shook as he filled his glass, he asked, ‘ What ails you, Ronald, to-day? You look out of sorts.’

‘ I have received unpleasant news from Plymouth.’

‘ From Plymouth!’ repeated the Duke. ‘ Not a letter from Saltcombe, surely?’

‘ No, Saltcombe has not written to me, but I have heard something affecting him which I do not like.’

‘What do you mean? Is he ill?’

‘No, not that.’

‘What is it, then?’

‘I don’t fancy his love-making is proceeding smoothly.’

‘The course of true love never did run smooth,’ said the Duke. ‘Lovers always fall out, and make up their quarrels next day. That is a commonplace in Cupid’s maxims.’

‘I don’t mean that,’ said the General. He was uneasy: strict in his ideas of right and wrong, he was unskilled to act a part and speak half the truth. He turned hot, then cold.

‘What is it, then?’

‘I believe Dulcinea Rigsby dresses very badly.’

‘I did not like her taste here, but that is a matter for ladies to consider, not men. For my part, I think the modern fashions detestable.’

‘I hear she makes herself ridiculous by her outrageous style.’

The Duke frowned.

‘Of course Saltcombe does not like his future wife to become the laughing-stock of Plymouth.’

The Duke pushed his glass from him. ‘Ronald,’ he said, ‘this is intolerable. A future

Marchioness of Saltcombe the—the laughing-stock—do you know what you are saying?’

The General crossed his legs, then uncrossed them, leaned back in his chair, filled his glass again, took some candied angelica, and said, looking uncomfortable and nervous, ‘Saltcombe is sensitive. He cannot stand that sort of thing. I hear he will be home to-morrow.’

‘Saltcombe—here! Do you mean to hint that the engagement is off?’

‘I know nothing definitely. I can’t say absolutely off, past all patching up. You can understand that if Miss Dulcina Rigsby gives herself airs unbecoming a lady, Saltcombe will feel it. The old father, too, the coffee-planter, is a rough stick, and perhaps does not know how far liberties are allowed on the footing on which he stands.’

The Duke looked grave. He picked some grapes and ate them. Then he said, ‘Saltcombe knows what befits his position. She who is to be Duchess of Kingsbridge when I am gone must not be an object of ridicule. If she were a princess of blood royal, and failed in tact, she would be unworthy to wear our strawberries. Not for the world would I do what is wrong, not for ten thousand worlds would I excite a

jeer.' He paused. 'You think Herbert will return. Very well. He will do what is right. I shall be glad to see him. You think the match is broken off. I am content. The house of Kingsbridge does not want Rigsbys to prop it up. Let us rejoin the ladies.'

In the meantime Lady Grace and Lucy were sitting side by side on the sofa in the drawing-room. Grace had her arm round Lucy's waist, and Lucy held a screen to cut off the red fire-light from her friend's face.

'How lively you are to-day, Lucy!' said Lady Grace. 'I do not know what it was at dinner that put my father and uncle out of spirits, and observing them I lost the desire to talk; but you flew to the rescue, and rattled on, and forced us all to laugh; and now I feel your heart; you are quivering with animation. What is it, Lucy? I have not found you in such buoyant humour for many a day.'

'Shall I tell you a secret?'

'If pleasant.'

'It is excellent. I am sure it will rejoice you.'

'Then do tell me.'

'What will you pay me for it?'

'I will give you a kiss.'

‘I will pour out my whole heart’s contents for that.’

‘Then do not tantalise me. What is it?’

‘What do you wish best of all?’

Lady Grace slightly coloured.

‘You do not like Miss Rigsby, do you?’ asked Lucy.

‘Oh, Lucy! don’t ask such a question.’

‘I do not. I detest her, a nasty, spoiled, conceited piece of goods, without fresh feeling, without good taste, without healthy brains.’

‘You must not say that,’ said Lady Grace.

‘I must and I will. I could not do so before. I can now.’ Her eyes danced, the dimples came in her pretty rosy cheeks, and her lips quivered. ‘Only think! Lord Saltcombe is home. It is all off.’

‘Herbert home!’ exclaimed Lady Grace. ‘What is off?’

‘The engagement. Broken off, and a good thing too. I am heartily glad, and could dance for joy. So could you. You never liked her. You never thought her worthy of Lord Saltcombe.’

‘Oh, Lucy!’ Lady Grace stood up. She was nervous with excitement. ‘Oh, dear Lucy, is this so? How do you know it?’

‘It is quite true. Are you not glad?’

Lady Grace hesitated and looked into the fire. ‘I do not know what to say. I hope he has not behaved badly. I cannot think that he has. Yet the breaking off of the engagement can hardly come from her. She seemed very fond of him.’

‘You may be quite sure Lord Saltcombe would not do what is wrong. I know nothing about how it came about, I only know that it is so. You never liked her, did you?’

‘No. I did my utmost to become attached to her, but I could not. How did you hear of this?’

‘Through my father.’

‘Did Lord Saltcombe write to him? Herbert has not deigned to send me a line since he left.’

‘Lord Saltcombe is at our house.’

‘Oh, Lucy!’

‘He did not like to appear here till Lord Ronald had prepared the Duke’s mind.’

‘Oh, Lucy! I wonder how he bears it. Do you think he was fond of her?’

‘I cannot believe it.’

‘Lucy! Nor do I. What is the meaning of this? I am like a deaf person at a play, or as one who comes in at the second act and sees

much movement, but is unable to lay hold of the threads of the plot: Uncle Edward, Aunt Elizabeth, Uncle Ronald, all seemed to me bent on this marriage. Beavis advised it. What made it so desirable? I asked Beavis at the ball, but he would tell me nothing. I am afraid this rupture will disappoint them. Uncle Ronald's face and cuff at dinner showed me he was disturbed. Why is he disturbed? What is there so attractive in Dulcina Rigsby?'

Instead of answering these questions Lucy said, 'My father says that Lord Saltcombe is looking wretchedly ill, so white, and hollow under the eyes.'

'Lucy! I must see him. Amuse the Duke whilst I run to the lodge. I cannot bear that my brother should be there unhappy and unwell, and I not see him and know the reason of his distress and sickness. I shall not be gone long. Make some excuse for my absence.'

In a very few minutes Lady Grace was in the park. She was in pale blue silk evening dress; she had thrown a cloak over her shoulders, and a light knitted woollen shawl over her head. The deer started as she passed, but when they heard her voice they came after her, thrusting their noses against her hand. She walked

quickly, and when she reached the steward's lodge a little colour was in her delicate cheeks.

‘Emily,’ she said to the maid who opened the door, ‘is Lord Saltcombe here?’

‘Yes, my lady. He is in the study with Mr. Beavis.’

‘They will excuse my interrupting them,’ she said, passed down the passage, lightly tapped at the door, and in another moment was in her brother's arms. Beavis withdrew, but not before Lady Grace, who never forgot what was due to every one, had put her hand into his and thanked him with her eyes. Her heart was too full to speak. The fine lips were quivering, and tears were trembling in her eyes like dew in the calyx of a flower.

She made her brother stand away from her at arm's length and looked at him.

‘Oh, Herbert!’ she said, in a low plaintive voice, ‘you have suffered. Oh, my dear, dear brother, I must know all. You cannot conceive the pain it is to me to be shut out from all the mysteries that surround you. You have no one but me, I none but you, who can perfectly understand and feel for each other. Tell me everything. You have not been ill in body. You have been ill in mind. Lucy will not be

candid with me, and she knows more than I. Beavis only bids me trust him. My Uncle Ronald is unapproachable. I must come to you. I cannot bear it. I cannot. Dear Herbert! as you love me, tell me everything.'

'Sit down, Grace.'

'No, I cannot; I must not stay. I can rest neither here nor anywhere, not on my bed, till the key is put in my hands. I lie awake thinking and puzzling till I fear I shall go mad. Anything is better than this uncertainty. Why are you unhappy? Why have you all made such a point of this marriage? Why is Uncle Ronald so upset because it is broken off? What did Beavis see in her to urge you to make her your wife?'

'I cannot tell you, Grace.'

'You must, Herbert. I will no longer be left in doubt.'

'Even the Duke does not know.'

'So I perceive. He alone has been indifferent.'

'You must be spared what would give you pain.'

'I do not ask to be spared. If you have a cross laid on your shoulder which is weighing you down, shift one arm to my shoulder and

give me your hand, we will carry it together. I am brave, Herbert. I can bear anything. Only one thing at a time, Herbert: first tell me—did you love *Dulcina*?’

‘I was determined to do so; I did my best, but I could not. Love will not be forced.’

‘I am glad to hear you say that. Your conduct is made doubly inexplicable now. Why did you propose to her?’

Lord Saltcombe hesitated. After a while, during which she waited with patience, he said, looking down, ‘Very well, Grace, know all. We are ruined. The marriage was arranged in the hopes of saving us from going to pieces. The Rigsbys are very rich.’

‘Is that all?’ asked Lady Grace, with a sigh of relief.

‘All!’ echoed Lord Saltcombe. ‘Ruin—our ruin proclaimed by every newspaper throughout England, the loss of our property, the sale of Court Royal.’

‘It will kill papa.’

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE COUNCIL OF COURT ROYAL.

THE first council of which we have given the acts was of a private nature. It had no pretensions to œcumenicity. It was a synod, not a council. It had been convoked in the interests of the Kingsbridge house, but had been attended by the Worthivale family only.

The aspect of affairs was now so desperate that a council was summoned to meet as soon as Lord Edward arrived from Sleepy Hollow.

The steward had called his son to his aid, and Beavis had gone carefully through the accounts—not an easy task, for his father was unsystematic.

‘What we want,’ said Mr. Worthivale, ‘is to gain time. Give us a little space in which to look about, and we will find another wealthy heiress for Lord Saltcombe. There are as good fish in the sea as they that come out of it.’ He clung to this forlorn hope.

Beavis spent several days over the accounts. He examined all the mortgages, the notes of hand ; he investigated the expenditure in its several branches, and brought all into form. His time in a lawyer's office stood him in good stead. He had acquired system, and a power of analysis lacking in his father.

Lord Edward arrived. To her great regret, Lady Elizabeth was unable to accompany him. Lent was approaching, and she had to arrange the services and appoint the preachers. Moreover, it was thought unadvisable for her to be away just then. A faint and hectic tinge of opinion had manifested itself in the pellucid brain of the excellent curate.

Whilst Beavis was at work his father continually interrupted him with explanations that were unnecessary, apologies for his own conduct that were uncalled for, and proposals that were inadmissible.

‘Lord Ronald spoke rather sharply to me the other day,’ he said. ‘He almost laid the blame on me for having got the family into such a condition.’

‘You have no occasion for self-reproach,’ said Beavis. ‘If it had been possible to effect anything, you would have done it. You have,

indeed, done for them more than you should. Lucy's money——'

'Now, no more on that point,' interrupted his father. 'We shall have it again, certainly.'

'The only thing that could have saved the family was a plain and bald statement of its difficulties and desperate condition, and that they would have refused to listen to. They buoy themselves up on hopes that are fallacious, and trust to a Providence to save them that expects every man to take the first steps towards saving himself.'

'Heaven knows I have preached retrenchment, but my words have been unheeded. Now take the books under your arm and come with me. They will be assembled by this time.'

Father and son walked through the park to Court Royal. Neither spoke; their thoughts depressed them. They entered the General's private sitting-room, and saw there Lord Edward, Lord Ronald, and the Marquess. At the door was Lady Grace. She put up her hand to stay Beavis. 'Please let me in also. Saltcombe has told me a little, I want now to know all.'

He hesitated, but without waiting for a refusal she passed in.

‘Grace!’ exclaimed Lord Ronald, ‘this may not be. It is rude to show a lady the door, but I cannot help myself when business is in consideration.’

‘I know what the business is,’ she answered, ‘and I am interested in it as well as you.’ She ran to the Archdeacon, and nestled on a stool at his side, took his right arm and put it over her shoulder. ‘Uncle Edward, speak a word for me.’

‘Let her stay,’ said the Archdeacon. ‘A woman’s wit is sometimes worth more than a man’s wisdom.’

‘Thank you, uncle!’ She pressed his hand.

The General occupied a hard chair with a straight back. He had crossed his legs and folded his arms. His face was grave and set. The Archdeacon sat in a lounging chair and kept his arm round his niece, sometimes raising his wrinkled hand to stroke her smooth hair. Lord Saltcombe stood in the window looking out. The steward opened proceedings by describing the condition of the finances. Two mortgages had been already called up, and another he feared every day would be so. Those already noted were on Court Royal and Kingsbridge. Rumour had no doubt been

busy with their name, for bills had poured in from all quarters, tradesmen's bills pressing for immediate payment. Probably the bad times, the fall in the value of land, and threatened legislation menacing land, had alarmed the mortgagees. As he went on he became confused, repeated himself, appealed to figures and read them wrong, and involved the case to such an extent that when he sat down none who had heard him were wiser than when he stood up.

Beavis had his chair near his father. He was distressed at the old man's inability to put clearly what he had to say, due to his inability to think clearly. He listened with patience, and when he had done he said, 'I have gone most carefully through all the accounts, have drawn up a table of debts, and a list of the mortgages and bills. I know exactly what the expenditure has been in every department during the last three years, also what the assets have been. Everything is here, *en précis*, on the table, in so simple a form that a child can understand it. The situation is one from which extrication is only possible by having recourse to heroic methods. If the family difficulties had been considered in time, salvation might not have been so difficult as it is now.'

‘Come, come!’ said the Archdeacon sharply, ‘don’t exaggerate.’

‘I am not exaggerating, my lord. May I pass these papers to you? You can convince yourself that I am speaking within the mark.’

‘What is the amount absolutely necessary?’ asked Lady Grace in a calm, low tone.

‘Oh, Lady Grace,’ said Beavis hastily, ‘you ought not to be here. You unnerve me.’

‘Let my presence rather brace you to declare the whole truth. Deal plainly with us. The surgeon’s hand must not tremble when he touches the wound.’

‘I need not enumerate all the mortgages,’ continued Beavis. ‘The heaviest is that of four hundred thousand on the Loddiswell property, the annual interest on which is sixteen thousand. That is just six thousand above what we are now drawing from the estates thus charged. This is in the hands of an Insurance Company, and is not called in. Seventy thousand was raised for the building of Court Royal. We have a little mortgage on Charlecombe. Neither of these is notified.’

‘Of course not,’ interrupted the steward.

‘There is a smaller, much smaller mortgage on the manor of Kingsbridge of four thousand

five hundred. As you may know, though his Grace is Lord of the Manor of Kingsbridge, he has very little property in the place itself. A higher mortgage could not be got on that. This is at four and three-quarters. So is that for forty-six thousand pounds on Court Royal itself. These two are in the hands of a Mr. Emmanuel, and he has given notice that they must be paid within three months. There is another, on Alvington, which we fear will also have to be met. It is not in the same hands, but in those of another Jew.'

'Well,' said Lord Ronald, 'fifty-five thousand pounds is not so prodigious a sum. I suppose these two mortgages can be transferred.'

'I do not think it. Remember that Court Royal is nearly all park—park and pleasure-ground bring in no rents.'

'Then some other mortgages must be imposed. If Court Royal and Kingsbridge be relieved, what matter?'

'We cannot afford to do that; besides, investments of this sort are looked shyly at now.'

'What is the total of the annual charges on the property?' asked the Archdeacon.

'Twenty-four to twenty-five thousand.'

‘And the income?’

‘At present under thirty-five thousand.’

‘Then—living on ten thousand.’

‘No—dying on it, my lord.’

A dead silence ensued. Lady Grace’s eyes were fixed on Beavis. Lord Saltcombe looked through the glass into the park, where the rooks were wheeling and dancing round their nests, which they were repairing with twigs, and stopping with tufts of pine shoots.

‘I have not deducted the annual cost of the property, the rates, taxes—nor the Duke’s thousand.’

‘It is the deuce of a mischief that the marriage has fallen through,’ said the General. ‘That would have set us on our feet again.’

Lord Saltcombe still said nothing.

‘If no one has a suggestion to make,’ said Beavis, ‘I will venture to make one. No one can doubt that I am heart and soul devoted to the cause of your illustrious house. I beg you to listen to me with patience if I am forced to say what is unpleasant. I know the pride, the legitimate pride, of the family. It is this pride which has allowed it to slip into such straits. With a little more readiness to look at facts, and accommodate itself to circumstances, the

financial position of the family would have been convalescent, and we should not now be wondering whether life or death is heavier in the scale of fate. Love of splendour, reckless improvidence, have made the deficit grow in geometrical proportions. Firmness—excuse my saying it—courage to grapple with the evil, have been wanting, and the evil has grown to such a head that it is almost past grappling with.’

‘Really, Mr. Beavis Worthivale,’ said the General, testily, ‘you forget our grey hairs. You are a young man, and you are lecturing men old enough to be your grandfathers.’

‘I think, Mr. Beavis, you are too strong in your expressions,’ said the Archdeacon.

His father, shocked beyond power of speech, seized him by the arms, and held up his hand in warning to be cautious.

‘He is right,’ said Lady Grace. ‘Uncle Ronald, do not be angry. He speaks the truth because he is too true a friend to withhold it from us.’

Beavis slightly bowed to her, and went on. ‘Safety may yet be had, but at a price. The only possible way out of the labyrinth of debt is for the Duke and the Marquess to resolve on

the sale of some of the estates. Unfortunately, a worse time for the sale of land could not have befallen us. I believe that good properties do not now fetch five-and-twenty years' purchase, and some are put up to auction and find no buyers. Still, let us hope for the best. Fowelscombe is worth two thousand a year; at thirty years' purchase that would be sixty thousand; add another ten thousand for the house and timber and exceptionally beautiful situation, that makes seventy thousand. With that you can pay off Mr. Emmanuel and one of the other smaller mortgages. I should advise, sell also the manorial rights in Kingsbridge. The town will buy those, and give a good price for them.'

'Really! really!' exclaimed the General, 'I cannot endure this. Sell the manor from which the Duke takes his title! What next?'

'Expenses will have to be cut down at least a half, the number of servants reduced, and the Marquess must make up his mind to continue living in the country, and keeping Kingsbridge House, Piccadilly, closed.'

'Put a bill in the window, "To be let furnished," and so make a few guineas,' gasped the General.

Lady Grace got up from her stool and put her arm through that of Lord Ronald, and remained at his side, holding his hand. Her touch soothed him and allayed his irritation.

‘The Duke will never consent to this,’ said Lord Edward.

‘It will not do, even to suggest it to him. So much of the family property has been thrown away by our ancestors, that he is particularly tenacious on this point. Nothing will induce him to part with an acre.’

‘He is talking of buying Revelstoke, not of selling,’ said Lord Ronald.

‘Remember,’ said Beavis, ‘if he will not voluntarily part with Fowelscombe, he will have Court Royal taken from under his feet and over his head. There is a power of sale in all mortgages.’

‘They will not dare to do it,’ exclaimed the General; ‘the whole country would rise up and cry shame.’

‘What do a parcel of Jew money-lenders care about the feelings of the country?’ said Beavis. ‘Besides, you mistake. The country would approve. It would cry shame on the house of Eveleigh for not making a voluntary effort to pay its debts.’

Lord Ronald's fingers nipped the hand of Lady Grace convulsively, and so sharply as to cause her pain. His face quivered, and he prepared to say an angry word, when she laid her other hand on his lips.

‘Mr. Beavis is quite right,’ she said; ‘I feel that he is. We should do everything in our power to pay our debts, and not lie, curled up in our pride like hedgehogs, for the dogs to worry.’

The General turned to his brother. ‘Edward,’ he said, ‘we look to you for advice. These hot-headed, rash young folk would fire the stack to expel the mice. You are a man of experience, with a business head. What do you propose?’

‘There is nothing like moderation,’ said the Archdeacon. ‘I object to all extremes, doctrinal or practical. Let us be *via media* in all we do and propose. I agree with you, Mr. Beavis, that something must be done. I think with you, Ronald, that his proposal is too drastic. My suggestion is quite other. Let Mr. Worthivale write to the mortgagees or their agents—I mean those who are pressing, and those likely to be troublesome—and ask for delay. It would not be wise to sell land

just now. Mr. Beavis said as much. The present depression cannot last. The wheat-producing area in America is rapidly being taken up, and the soil is becoming exhausted, at the same time that the population of America is increasing, and therefore the home consumption is greater. We want nothing but delay. Invite the two or three disagreeable mortgagees to a meeting at the lodge, and we shall see what will be the result. I shall make a point of being there.'

Beavis gathered the papers together. His cheeks were flushed.

'Saltcombe has not spoken,' exclaimed Lord Ronald, 'yet he is the one most concerned.'

'I bow to the superior wisdom of my uncles,' answered the Marquess, 'though I agree with Beavis. I do not, however, see any chance of persuading the Duke to a sale.'

'I think with you, Herbert, in this as in all things,' said Lady Grace. 'Let us have amputation before mortification sets in.'

At that moment a tap at the door, and the Duke's valet entered hastily, looking frightened.

'My lords,' he said, 'his Grace is not well! Something has happened!'

CHAPTER XXXVII.

A SISTER OF MERCY.

THE brothers of the Duke, his son and daughter, hurried to his apartment in alarm. The Worthivales, father and son, remained where they were, anxious to know the cause of alarm, but unwilling to intrude.

The Archdeacon turned faint; he also suffered from the heart, and the Marquess was obliged to lend him an arm. The General and Lady Grace were the first to enter the Duke's morning sitting-room.

We must explain the cause of the Duke's excitement.

He had been taking his breakfast when the valet informed him that a lady—a Sister of Mercy—had called and desired very particularly to see his Grace, if he would generously allow her an interview of five minutes.

‘A Sister of Mercy!’ exclaimed the Duke.

‘What—Thompson, in the hall! Kept her waiting?—Excellent people—most certainly I will see her. Some subscription wanted to an orphanage, or a refuge, or a laundry. Show her up at once—of course, of course.’

A lady entered in black, closely veiled.

‘Take a chair, my dear madam,’ said the Duke rising. ‘Thompson, put a chair. That will do. Pray be seated, madam.’

‘Thank your Grace,’ said the Sister, waiting till the valet had left the room; ‘I had rather stand. I will not detain you five minutes.’

‘No detention at all, except as a pleased captive,’ said the Duke. ‘It does an old worthless fellow like me, shelved from all useful work, good to see one whose life is devoted to doing deeds of charity, to care and toil for others. The Sister of Mercy sums up in her little self the whole duty of man, as a proverb condenses the experience of ages.’

‘Your Grace must excuse me. I do no deeds of charity. I owe no duties to my fellows. I am not a Sister. I am a nobody. I am only Joanna.’ She threw back her veil. The Duke looked at her with mingled surprise and admiration; surprise, because he did not

understand her words, admiration at her beauty.

‘You have not heard of me,’ said Joanna. ‘I do not suppose you have; but I know about you, and I know more concerning your affairs than do you yourself. I dressed in this disguise to come here, because I did not wish the servants to recognise and stop me. I determined to see your Grace. I am only a small mouse, and you a great lion, but you are fallen into a net, and I can bite the threads and free you.’

‘You must excuse me, Miss Joanna—but I really do not see your drift and understand to what I owe the honour of this visit.’ The Duke put his hand to his head.

‘Your Grace is in the hands of Jews.’ Joanna opened a little handbag, and threw some deeds on the table. ‘Look there—the mortgages my master holds. I have taken them. I bring them to you. Tear them up and burn them, and Lazarus cannot touch you. I am with Lazarus. I would have allowed myself to be hacked to pieces rather than hurt him, but he dealt falsely by me. He sent me here to pry into and discover for him your affairs. Lord Saltcombe and Lady Grace have

been kind to me. I will not help to bring them down. I will show them that I am grateful. I love—I dearly love Lady Grace.'

'My good Miss Joanna,' said the Duke, 'I am perplexed beyond measure. I cannot understand——'

'Those deeds will explain all,' said Joanna, interrupting him. 'I have not many minutes to spare. I have come here from Plymouth, and must return whilst my master is absent. All lies in a nutshell. There are your mortgages. Destroy them.'

'I cannot touch them,' said the Duke. 'Do you mean to tell me that you have abstracted them from the holder?'

'Yes, I took them from his strong box.'

'You have acted very wrongly. You have committed a crime. You are liable to be tried for this and imprisoned. This is robbery.'

'I do not care. I want to do something for Lady Grace. I am the Jew's heir, and if I steal the money I rob myself. There is no harm in that. Besides, he used me unfairly in sending me here, and I will pay him out for it.'

'You must go back at once and replace these documents where you found them.'

‘You will not destroy them?’

‘Most certainly not.’

‘But I will tear them to shreds.’

‘That will not relieve me. I am morally bound by them. I should meet my liabilities just the same whether the deeds existed or were destroyed. I hold their counterparts, and will act on them. There—child—take them back, and never, never again act in so rash a manner. Your motives may be good, but your conduct has been most reprehensible.’

‘Your Grace does not know all. The truth is kept from you. Ask Lord Saltcombe, ask Lord Ronald, to tell you the truth. Or there—look at this Society paper. There is a paragraph in it about you. My master put it in, and was paid for the information. No—do not look at it till I am gone. I tell you that you are ruined, and the world knows it now. Your last hope was in the marriage of Lord Saltcombe, and that is taken from you. Will you have the mortgages?’

‘Certainly, certainly not,’ said the Duke, uneasy, offended, bewildered. He could not understand who Joanna was, why she addressed him, what her interest in him was, and his

pride was hurt at her offer, at her daring to talk of his embarrassments to his face.

‘And really,’ he continued, after a pause, ‘I am at a loss to explain this visit; though I feel flattered that my family, or any members in it, should have inspired——’

Joanna again interrupted him. ‘Your Grace, my time is precious. I must be off. I have made you the offer, and you have refused it. I can do no more. There is the paper. I have marked the paragraph with blue pencil.’

She thrust the deeds back in her bag, and, before the Duke had put his hand to the bell, left the room.

The Duke sat for some moments rubbing his brow, trying to gather his thoughts. The visit was so short, Joanna’s manner so extraordinary, her offer so outrageous, that the old man was completely thrown out of his usual train by it. He shook his head and took up the Society paper. His eye was caught at once by the paragraph Joanna had pencilled. It was to the effect that the projected marriage between the Marquess of S——, heir to the most embarrassed Duke in the three kingdoms, and the daughter of a wealthy planter from the East Indies, was broken off owing to the

ruinous condition of the Duke's affairs, and to the fact that the father of the lady declined to allow his hard-won savings to be thrown away in washing the Duke's hands. The editor added that it was satisfactory to know that some birds were sufficiently old not to be caught with *Salt*!

The state of excitement into which reading this threw the Duke alarmed Thompson, and he ran to summon aid. Mrs. Probus, on hearing that the Duke was ill, ordered one of the grooms to ride for the doctor, a hot bath to be got ready, a couple of bricks to be put into the kitchen fire for application to his Grace's soles, and to direct that spirits and cordials should be taken at once to the Duke's apartment.

When the General entered, followed by Lady Grace, he found Lucy already by the chair of the old man, vainly endeavouring to pacify him. The Duke tried to speak, but words failed him. He held the newspaper and waved it impatiently, and pointed to it, with the other hand. Lucy had a glass of water, and entreated him to drink it, but he shook his head angrily.

Then the Archdeacon came in, leaning on Lord Saltcombe's arm.

‘What is it? What is the matter? Is it a fit?’ he asked. ‘Bathe his temples with vinegar, give him sal volatile. The action of the heart must be stimulated.’

The Duke was irritated at the attempts to doctor him with cold water and compresses, with vinegar and cordials. After a moment of struggle he gasped forth, ‘Take this trash away. I am not ill. I am insulted. Get along with you, Thompson. Turn the servants out. I don’t want all the world here.—Please leave my chair, Lucy.—Grace, I had rather you were not in the room. What have you all come tumbling in on me for in this fashion? I am not dying. The room is not in flames. I pray you—leave me alone with my brothers.’

‘Please let me stay by you, papa,’ said Lady Grace.

He made an impatient gesture with his head, but she would take no denial. She stepped back behind his chair, and Lucy left the room.

When the Duke saw that he had only his son and brothers before him, he recovered himself, and, holding out the paper, exclaimed, ‘I have been insulted—grossly insulted. Look at this!’

The Archdeacon took the paper from his hand, and read it.

‘What is it, Edward?’ asked the General.

‘Hand him the paper, Edward, when you have done reading the precious production. What do you think it dares—actually dares to say? Upon my word, the temerity of the press is inconceivable. It has the audacity to declare that we are ruined; that I—I, the Duke of Kingsbridge, am living on the forbearance of my creditors. Bless my soul! where are the lightnings of heaven, that they do not flash on heads that dare think, and tongues and hands that dare speak and write, such outrages?’

The General turned white and looked down. The Archdeacon folded the paper with trembling hands, and laid it on the table.

‘I wish,’ said Lord Ronald, ‘that the old times were back, when I might call the editor out and put a pistol-shot through his head.’

‘That cannot be. It is impossible now. A gentleman cannot redress a wrong,’ said the Duke. ‘If he takes a horsewhip and touches a dog that has snarled at him, he has to endure the indignity of being summoned for assault. You have not read the paragraph, Ronald.’

You had better not. It will fire your blood, and you will be committing some indiscretion. It dares to insinuate that we sent the Marquess hunting that girl for her money wherewith to buy off our creditors and secure prolongation of days to ourselves.'

Lord Ronald was too confused to speak, his temples became spotted red. He took the paper and read it.

'What has occasioned this?' asked his Grace. 'Is it possible that gossip is at work upon us—groundless gossip? Who has started it? How far has it gone? I know well enough that our fortunes are not as magnificent as they were in the reigns of the first Georges, and that the property is encumbered, but that is all. What is the meaning of this calumny starting to life?'

The Archdeacon looked at the Marquess, but as the General and Lord Saltcombe looked at him—the mainstay of the family—he answered, 'Do not put yourself out, Duke. There is no accounting for the origin and progress of tittle-tattle. It springs out of nothing, and swells to portentous size on nothing.'

'But, Edward, it kills like the fluke in the sheep. That also springs from an impercep-

tible nothing, but its effects are felt, not by the sheep only, but by the farmer, the landowner, and the parson. A germ of microscopic smallness disturbs the social system; no rents, no tithe, no trade.'

'Of course there are mortgages and debts,' said the Archdeacon.

'Of course there are,' exclaimed the Duke. 'There always have been, What landed estate is unencumbered? But what of that? Every oak bears oak-apples as well as acorns.'

'Put the paper in the fire,' said Lord Ronald, 'and its contents out of your mind.'

'The one is done more easily than the other,' answered the Duke. 'Indeed, the one is possible, the other is not; a bullet may be extracted, but the wound remains to ache and fester. But are things in a bad state here—so bad, I mean?' He turned to the Marquess. 'Saltcombe,' he said, 'since I have been ill you have had the charge of everything. I hope you have done your duty, and can answer to the point when I ask, is there occasion for this impertinence?' The Marquess hesitated. He was afraid of alarming his father; he could not dissemble. Whilst he hesitated Lady Grace stepped forward, knelt down at her father's

feet, and leaning her hands on his knees, whilst she looked up fearlessly into his eyes, said, 'Papa, we are quite wrong in regarding you as too weak to bear bad news. You are a rock, and can stand the storm as well as the sunshine, is it not so? Well, dearest papa, it is quite true we are ruined. We do not know where to turn for money. The mortgagees are calling in their mortgages. There is nothing for it but to sell some of the property.' She paused, then turned with a smile to her uncles. 'There,' she said, 'see how brave the dear old man is! how erect the silver head is held! He is no coward; he is not afraid to hear the truth, however dreadful the truth may be.'

The Duke was flattered. He bent forward and kissed his daughter on her brow. Then he leaned back in his chair, and looked from one to another. 'She exaggerates, no doubt.'

'It is too true, father,' said the Marquess, 'we have got into almost inextricable confusion. Still—there is hope. Worthivale is going to write to the troublesome mortgagees, and arrange for a delay.'

'Worthivale should never have allowed things to come to this pass. But I see exactly how it is. Worthivale is an alarmist, excellent

fellow though he be. He is always crying out that there is no money for anything, and it has become a habit with him to hold up his hands and eyes in despair. He has persuaded himself that we are ruined, and you have been weak enough to listen to him and believe all he says. I know why he is crying out now. He is scared at the idea of my buying Revelstoke. You may tell him that I give it up; thereupon his sky will be set with a triple rainbow.'

'I agree with you,' said Lord Edward. 'Mr. Worthivale has taken his son Beavis into confidence, and the new broom sweeps up a dust. In a little while the dust will settle, and all go on as before.'

'Oh, Beavis!' exclaimed the Duke, 'this is Beavis's cry of wolf, is it?'

'Papa,' said Lady Grace in urgent tones, 'when the wolf did come the cry was disregarded.'

'Do not you meddle in these matters, my pretty,' said the Duke. 'It was cruel of them to disturb your mind with these false alarms. You should live above all sordid money cares. Go back to your flowers.' Then turning to the others: 'Worthivale is a good man of business, he will manage all.'

‘But, papa,’ said Lady Grace, ‘how came you to get this wicked paper? Was it sent you by post?’

‘No, dear. I received a call this morning from a lady, a Sister of Mercy, and she left it.’

‘What! a Sister of Mercy read a Society paper!’

‘Yes—I suppose so—even a Sister of Mercy—that is—but, upon my word, I am so bewildered; I hardly know who she really was. I rather incline to think she was a maniac.’

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

REFORMATION.

SINCE Joanna's return from Court Royal lodge a change for the better had been effected in the house of the Golden Balls. She had been firm with Lazarus, and he had yielded. She kept everything in good order; she refused peremptorily to have the kitchen and what belonged to the housekeeping department untidy and broken. She got white lime, mixed it herself, and with a pawned mason's brush whitewashed the kitchen, the back kitchen, and her own attic bedroom. She mixed yellow ochre with the wash and coloured the walls. Where the slates in the floor were broken, she relaid them herself in cement of her own mixing. She stitched some muslin and made a blind for her window. She scrubbed the shelves and table in the kitchen with pumice-stone and soda, till the white deal shone like new. When work

for the day was over, she laid a rug before the kitchen fire, brought the tea-table before it, threw over it a cloth, and put on it her lamp. She seated herself beside the stove, with the door open, so that the red light flickered over her knees and skirt, and white stockings and neat shoes, whilst the lamp irradiated her face and hands, intent and engaged on needlework.

Joanna had always been an energetic worker, never idle, but her work hitherto had been unsystematic, undirected, desultory; it was like her conscience, unsystematic, undirected, spasmodic in action. She had done what came to hand, and done it as the light of nature taught her. At Court Royal lodge she had seen order, cleanliness, reduced to clock-work. She had learned that comfort was inseparable from both. Her feminine instinct for what is seemly and right was satisfied, and she was resolved, with the whole strength of her strong will, to reform the domestic arrangements at the Golden Balls.

She had several battles with Lazarus, but she was victorious along the line. The meals were better. He had made himself ill by the nastiness of the food he had eaten whilst she was away, and he was ready to yield a point

in this particular, on her return, for his own health's sake. She did not openly oppose him when she found she could carry her purpose by quiet persistence.

When in Plymouth—at his private money-lending office, at which he was present for some hours in the day, an office without name on the door or window, quite a private lodging, to all appearance—he was well dressed, that is, in respectable clothes, without patches, without splits, not discoloured. On his return he dived at once into his bedroom, and re-emerged, the wretchedest of old ragmen. 'It is in eating, Joanna, that clothes get spoiled. If we were angels, neither eating nor drinking, our clothes would never wear out. With the utmost care we cannot avoid speckling and splashing the cloth.'

'Where are my house clothes?' he asked one day, putting his head—only his head—out at the door. 'I can't find them anywhere, and I've been hunting for them high and low. I'll catch my death of cold. Have you taken them to darn? Tell me. I am all of a shiver.'

'I did take them,' said Joanna; 'but they are not fit for you to put on.'

'Oh, for the matter of that, this is home, sweet home, and anything will do there.'

Joanna, be a dearie, and walk backwards with them, and pass them in at the door whilst I hold it ajar.'

'I can't—I've sold them.'

'Sold them!' cried the Jew. 'Sold the very skin off my back! Oh, Joanna, I hope you had a good offer for them.'

'I sold them as old rags, three pounds for a penny. There was not many pounds in them; you had worn them threadbare.'

'Oh, Joanna! what am I to do? Where is the money?'

She came towards the door.

'I have it in my hand.'

He uttered a little scream, and drew in his head and shut the door. 'Pass it under. Brrr! it is dreadfully raw! What am I to do for clothes?'

She stood outside, and heard him counting the coppers.

'Very little, wretchedly little,' he muttered. 'You might almost as well have thrown the things away.'

'That would have been against the principles on which I have been reared—never do anything for nothing.'

'True doctrine,' said the Jew, 'I was speak-

ing poetically. I strew flowers sometimes. It is my mind—ornate.'

Presently he called very loud, 'Joanna! I say, Joanna!'

'Well,' she answered, 'what do you want?'

'I'm quivering like gold-leaf,' he said plaintively through the door; 'I can't come out as I am.'

'Put on again the suit you went out in.'

'But I want my tea.'

'What of that?'

'It may drip. And bread and butter.'

'Well?'

'The little bits with butter on them may fall on my knees butter downwards, and stain me.'

'I've made you a sort of blouse,' said Joanna through the keyhole, 'in which you can be respectable. You can slip it over your suit when you come in.'

'But the seat, Joanna; the wear and tear there is sickening.'

'I've cushioned your chair,' she replied through the keyhole.

After a while Lazarus appeared, respectably dressed. Then the girl produced a smock she had made, and he drew it over his head.

‘I look rustic in it,’ he said; ‘but I see the idea—it will save clothes. I approve.’

The kitchen looked cosy with the lamp and fire, the hearth-rug, the table-cloth, and the tea-things, and with the curtain drawn.

‘It is beautiful, but expensive,’ said Lazarus. ‘Dear heart alive! you are burning the coals very fast.’

‘I’ve reckoned up, and find it cheapest to have a good fire,’ answered Joanna, ‘cheaper by sevenpence three farthings per night.’

‘How do you make that out?’ asked the Jew. ‘I’d be proud to know how spending can be converted into saving.’

‘I worked one night without fire,’ said Joanna in reply. ‘I worked at the coat-turning, and my fingers were so cold I could hardly hold the needle, and had to put them in my mouth to bring the feeling into them. The next evening I worked with fire, the same number of hours, at the same sort of work, and did half as much again with warm fingers. Then I ciphered it all up—so much done at so many hours, and coals, by measure, at fourteen shillings per ton, and I reckon I cleared sevenpence three farthings.’

‘Seven times eight makes fifty-six. Twelves

in fifty-six, four-and-eight over. Seven farthings, one-and-three over. Penny three farthings from four-and-eight makes a total of four-and-sixpence farthing. Say twelve weeks of firing, that makes—twelve times four, forty-eight; twelve times six, six shillings; forty-eight and six make fifty-four. Why, Joanna, that is the clearing of two pounds twelve and threepence per annum. At that rate you may burn coals and I will not grumble.'

'There is nothing like thrift, is there, master?'

'Ah,' said the Jew, 'talk of the beauties of nature! What I look to is the moral lessons it preaches. How many of your holiday-takers, who run over the sea cliffs, look at the thrift that covers them, and lay the flowers to heart? I'm not one who approves of hoarding. Hoarding is a low and savage virtue, but Turning-over is the cultured virtue. Turn your eggs and they don't addle, but they won't set. It is better with moneys. You can always restore the vital heat to them in your pocket, turn them over, and hatch out of them a pretty brood.'

Lazarus spread his hands before the fire, and the light played over his face. He smiled with satisfaction

‘The domestic circle,’ said he to himself, or Joanna, or both, ‘is a very pleasant circle to him who is its centre. I only passed through it as the man in the circus goes through a hoop, and mine was on fire, and singed me. Nevertheless, I won’t say but——’

He did not finish his sentence, and Joanna did not trouble herself to inquire what he intended to say.

‘I think a shave wouldn’t do you harm,’ she observed. ‘There is a frowsy growth on your upper lip like a neglected plantation.’

‘I’m going to grow a moustache,’ said the Jew. ‘I’m about to mark an epoch with it.’

‘You—you going to make yourself ridiculous?’

‘Not at all ridiculous. I’ve come to that period of life when a judicious growth of hair disguises the ravages of time.’

‘Pray, what is the epoch to be marked by a moustache?’ asked the girl.

Instead of answering the question directly, he sighed, stretched his legs and arms, and said, ‘I’m a lone, lorn widower.’

‘That ought not to trouble you much,’ observed Joanna. ‘You’ve been a grass widower long enough.’

‘That is just it, Joanna,’ said the Jew; ‘I’ve been in grass so long that I should like now to get into clover.’

‘Do you think of retiring from business?’ asked the girl.

‘Oh dear, no! I couldn’t live without it.’

‘Then you will allow me to spend more on housekeeping?’

He shook his head and hitched his shoulders uneasily. ‘I’m not inclined to launch out far yet,’ he said, with an intonation on the last word. ‘The time will soon come when it will be otherwise. I am going to foreclose on those Kingsbridge people. What is more, I’ve been about and seen some of the other mortgagees, and given them such a scare that I’ve no doubt they will do the same. I’ve got it into the Society papers, Joanna—published to the world that the great ironclad Duke is foundering. The beauty of my position is that I strike at the heart. I have my hold on Court Royal itself. They will sell anything rather than that; and if they once begin to sell, it will go like a forest on fire—there will be no stopping it.’

‘They will be beyond your reach when the marriage takes place,’ said Joanna.

‘I have put a spoke in that wheel. The marriage is broken off.’

Joanna was sincerely distressed. ‘I wish I had done nothing for you. I wish—I wish I had not!’

‘You have done everything for me,’ said Lazarus. ‘Through you I have ascertained who are the mortgagees, and who hold the bills, and I have been able to see and scare them all. Even the Insurance Company, that has the heaviest mortgage of all, is made uneasy. You may depend upon it, I have taken the pillars between my arms, and brought down the house upon the Philistines.’

Joanna burst into tears.

‘There, there,’ said the Jew, ‘you have been dazzled and bewitched by those aristocrats, like so many others. It is a short enchantment that will soon pass. Joanna, we will have a bloater for supper. Eh? soft roe! eh?’

Joanna held down her head, and the tears dropped on the work on which she was engaged. Lazarus looked at her with a peculiar expression in his eyes. Then he began to whistle plaintively to himself Azucena’s song

in 'Trovatore,' 'Homeward returning to our green mountain.'

Presently the girl looked up, saw him watching her, and something in his expression offended her, for she coloured, and said, 'I did not know you were musical.'

'I'm what you may call a many-sided man,' answered the Jew, full of prismatic twinkle and colour. 'You've only seen me under one aspect, and that the business one—appraising goods, whacking little boys, and scolding you. But there is more in me than you suppose. You've thought me hard, may be, but I'm like a sirloin of beef—I have my tender undercut. You've thought me cold, because I'm not given to blaze and crackle with emotion and sentiment, but I'm a slow combustion stove, lined with firebrick, and when alight I give out a lot of heat for my size. There are some men like the greengage—all sweetness without, but the heart within is stony. There are others like the walnut, rugged and hard as to their exterior, but nutty and white and delicious when you get at their insides. Such, Joanna, am I.'

'I've never tasted the nuttiness yet,' said the girl.

‘But it is there.’ He shook his head. ‘Wait till my moustache is grown, and that Kingsbridge pack of cards is tossed about, and you’ll see wonders.’

‘I want to see no more of you than I am forced to,’ she muttered.

‘Oh, Joanna, don’t say that! I suppose now, taking all in all, that you have got a certain amount of liking for me.’

‘What do you mean by “taking all in all”? Do you mean taking your heap of greasy, patched clothes, and your frowsy face, and your long and dirty finger-nails, and your stingy habits, and the way you smack your lips over food that is palatable, and the way in which you are ogling me now—taking all this together I have a liking for you? No, nothing of the kind.’

‘Why do you say these offensive things, Joanna? We belong to each other like a pair of stockings; one can’t go on without the other.’

‘I think I could shift without you,’ said Joanna. ‘There is the bell; some one is at the door.’

A moment after Charles Cheek’s voice was heard in the passage.

‘Is the boss in? I want to see him. Not but what I wanted to see you also, Joanna; but that is a permanent craving.’

‘Here is Mr. Lazarus,’ said the girl, ushering the young man into the kitchen. ‘I’ve put him on a smock to keep him respectable.’

‘What do you want with me?’ asked Lazarus, with lowering brow and without a salutation.

‘This is a civil reception, is it not?’ exclaimed the young man. ‘What else can I want of you but money? I am cleaned out, and desire accommodation till my father relaxes. He is out of humour just now, and will send me no more than my allowance. As if a young fellow of spirit could live within his allowance.’

‘Why did you not come to my office at a proper time?’ asked Lazarus, almost rudely.

‘Because money-lending and money-taking are proper to you at all times.’

‘I can let you have no more. You have had abundance, and I shall lose what I have lent already.’

‘How much is that?’

‘I cannot tell till I have looked.’

‘Well, go and see.’

Lazarus rose reluctantly from his chair, and, taking a candle, lit it at the fire and went to his room. When Joanna saw that he was gone she drew near to Charles Cheek, and looking up in his face with a grave expression said, ‘Do not come here after money. Lazarus will ruin you.’

‘But I must have money. If my father will not find it, I must obtain it elsewhere.’

‘When did you see your father last?’

‘A century ago.’

‘Why do you see him so seldom?’

‘Because I am not partial to lectures on extravagance.’

‘You deserve them. Go to your father; tell him the truth; promise him to be more prudent.’

‘No use, Joanna. I cannot be prudent. It is not in me. I must spend, just as the sun emits light and the musk fragrance.’

‘Neither of these exhausts itself. You must not, you must not, indeed, come to Lazarus. I know how this works. In seven years I ought to know. It brings inevitably to ruin, and I would not have you come to that.’

‘Why not, Joey?’

‘Because I like you, Charlie.’

Both laughed. His impertinence had been met and cast back in his face.

‘Upon my word, Joanna, I wish you could take me in hand and manage me; then something might be made out of me.’

‘I cannot take that responsibility on me. I turn coats, not those who wear them. But I can advise you. I do entreat you to listen to me. I speak because you have been kind to me, and I do not meet with so much kindness as to be indifferent to those who show it me. I would like to see you out of Lazarus’s books. You can give him no security—only your note of hand. Do you consider what interest he takes on that? There—go home, see your father, tell him what you want; make no promises if you are too weak to keep them.’

‘I wish you would let me come here sometimes and ask you what I am to do when in a hobble. You have brains.’

‘Do what I ask you now, and you may. It is vain to expect help if you will not follow advice.’

‘Upon my word,’ said the young man, ‘I wish it were possible for me to make you Mrs.

Charlie Cheek, and then, maybe, you would be able to make a man of me.'

'Not possible,' said Joanna.

'Why not?'

'The material is not present out of which to make a man.'

Then both laughed, but Charles Cheek laughed constrainedly, and coloured. She had cut him to the quick, but the cut did him good. He was a kindly, easy-disposed young man, without guile, marred by bad bringing up. He had one rare and excellent quality: he was humble and knew his own shortcomings. Joanna was wrong. With that, the making of a man was in him. Had he been conceited, it would not.

'How much do you want?' asked Lazarus entering. He had heard them laugh, and supposed they had made a joke about him.

'Nothing,' answered the young man. 'I have changed my mind. I'll try my father again before I come to you, Bloodsucker!'

CHAPTER XXXIX.

OVER A SNAIL.

‘WELL, Joe, flourishing?’

‘Middling, Charlie.’

Joanna was seated in the shop of the Golden Balls next day behind the counter, engaged on her needlework, when Charles Cheek came in, and swung the door behind him, so that it clashed and jarred the glass.

‘You must not be violent,’ said Joanna, ‘or the breakages will go down to your bill along with the silk gown and the necklace. Why have you not gone to your father as you promised?’

‘I am ashamed to appear before him,’ answered young Cheek. ‘If I tell him the truth he will kick me out of the house, and not pay my return ticket.’

‘Do you want a large sum?’

‘I lost my money in a way I daren’t con-

fess. My governor is a man of a practical turn of mind, and will insist on particulars. I am bad at invention, and if I begin to tell lies he will find me out, and be down on me like the steam-hammer at the docks !’

‘Then tell him the truth. That always answers, for no one believes it.’

‘I cannot. The case is too gross. This did it.’ He drew a snail-shell from his pocket, and set it on the counter. ‘Will you deal with me for this article? It is a curiosity, and a costly one. It cost me a hundred pounds.’

Joanna took up the snail-shell, and turned it about, then put it down contemptuously. ‘There is nothing particular about this shell except its size.’

‘Yes, there is. She is a racer. I lost a hundred pounds on her. I cannot tell my father that. I was proud of my snail, too, and now she is either dead or sulky. She has not put out her head since I lost my money on her.’

‘How did you manage that?’

‘By racing, I tell you.’ Charles Cheek jumped on the counter and seated himself on it, close to Joanna.

‘Will you take a chair?’ she asked.

‘No, thank you. This is my only chance of getting you to look up to me. I am going to tell you about my snail.’ He thrust the shell before her. ‘Do look at this beast. She has lost me a hundred pounds.’

Joanna continued sewing, without looking off her work.

‘Joe,’ he said, ‘what do you think of that?’

‘I had rather be the snail than you.’

‘I will tell you how it was. Captain Finch and I have played a good deal together of late at billiards, and we have also raced our snails. His is a very good runner. His regiment is under orders for India; so we resolved to have a final trial between our snails for double or quits. Mine started right enough, but became lazy, and I touched her. When I did that, the snail, instead of running the faster, retreated within her shell. I was frightened, and applied the lighted end of my cigar to the shell. She ought to have rushed out, but, instead, went into sulks. She has not put out her horns since. Joe, you ought to sympathise with me and help me; I had christened my racer after you.’

‘My name is not Joe.’

‘My snail was called Joanna.’

‘Why did you name a snail after me? It was no compliment.’

‘I called her after the jolliest girl I knew. I had to give her a name, and I could think only of you at the time. I can’t tell my governor the story of the snail, can I? Invent me something to take its place.’

Joanna shook her head. ‘I cannot do that,’ she said gravely; ‘I never tell a lie to Lazarus. If ever I see my mother again, I will be true to her in every word I utter. You must be true to your father. Whom can we be true to except our own parents? As for the public’—her lips curled with scorn—‘there is no sin in lying to them. They love lies as rats love aniseed. Put your snail in water, and she’ll put out her head.’

‘I never thought of that. Give me a saucer and water, and we will try. I dare say she is as dry as a sermon.’

Joanna complied with his request. No customer came into the shop just then; had one come, he would have seen two young heads bowed over a saucer with a little water in it, watching a snail. The one head was fair, the other dark; the one face good-

natured, feeble, the other full of character and intelligence. Both pleasant in appearance; the young man good-looking, the girl beautiful; he with almost boyish simplicity, she with womanly shrewdness.

‘She is stirring, by Jove!’ exclaimed Charlie Cheek.

‘I said she would. I am never mistaken.’

‘It was a case of double or quits,’ explained the young man; ‘that is how I came to lose so much. There was a matter of fifty pounds between us, so when Finch proposed double or quits on a snail race, I said “Done!”’

‘And done you are,’ said Joanna. ‘The snail was wiser than you. When burnt, she retired from the contest, and you persevered.’

‘There comes her head,’ exclaimed Cheek.

‘Yours is to come,’ said Joanna.

‘Don’t be hard on me, Joe; I shall get bad words enough from my father. He is a rough man, and lets his tongue play, and his tongue is a lash of iron. I confess to you—I would to no one else—I am ashamed of myself; I am too weak. I can’t say No to a fellow.’

‘You are like the jelly-fish, carried ashore

by the tide ; where the tide leaves them they lie, and dissolve away into nothing.'

'You are hard on me.'

'Is it not so? A man should have backbone or he is nothing. I was cast up by the tide, but I am solid.'

'It is easy for you to talk. You have a head. I only wish you were my sister, to be always at my elbow.'

'Last night you lamented that I was not your wife. Which do you mean?'

The young man coloured and fidgeted. He drew his head away ; it had been in close proximity to hers, over the saucer.

'Of course I am joking,' he said.

'What, now, or last night?' She laughed, then said, 'See! I have frightened you by pretending to take your words as earnest. Do not be alarmed. I do not desire responsibility for a man, in either capacity, who is unable to care for himself.'

'But—Joanna! this shall be my last folly. I solemnly swear it. You are the only person I know who has spoken plainly to me—except my father, and he makes me mad, he hurts me. If ever I am disposed to give way when I ought to be firm, I'll remember the jelly-fish.'

He spoke in a tone of hurt pride and real distress. Joanna put forth her hand and grasped his, whilst her face shone with pleasure. 'That is right,' she said cheerily. 'It does my heart good to hear you speak thus. If you want to give me the greatest of pleasures, it will be to let me know that you have kept your word, for, in spite of your weakness, I do like you. Moreover, to prove to you that I have confidence in you, I will help you now. You shall have the hundred pounds in a week.'

'How will you get it?' asked the young man. 'Not from Lazarus, surely.'

'No,' she replied, looking grave. 'I would not for the world apply to him to lend it to me.'

'Whence is it to come? Not from your wages, saved?'

'I receive no wages, I am a pawn.'

'A hundred pounds! You will obtain that for me?'

'You shall know about it to-morrow. To-morrow you go to your father.'

'I will go, certainly. How will you find the hundred pounds?'

'Never mind. It shall be done to restore the credit of my name, as the snail bears it.'

'I wish you would tell me how it is to be got.'

‘No, you will find out in time. I am not doing this for you, but for the sake of the snail that bears my name.’

‘Thank you, Joanna; you said something different when you made the offer. I *must* pay Captain Finch before he sails; a debt of honour is binding and must be paid, a debt to a tradesman may. If I had been unable to find the money, I think I should have destroyed myself.’

‘No,’ said the girl, shaking her head. ‘To do that demands a firmer character than you have got. How would you have done it, pray?’

‘I do not know. I dare say I should have jumped into the sea.’

‘That is bad,’ said Joanna. ‘I have tried it.’

‘What is good?’

‘There must be some easy way of slipping out of life when life becomes unendurable.’

‘Oh yes. The simplest of all is laudanum. That sends you to sleep, and you sleep away into the never-ending slumber.’

‘Repeat the name.’

‘What on earth can you want with lauda-

num? You are not tired of existence, I suppose?’

Joanna said nothing.

‘Oh, look at the snail!’ exclaimed the young man. ‘She is getting out of the saucer, she is lively again. I might race her again and win back my hundred pounds.’

‘No,’ said Joanna, ‘you have done with these follies. Life is serious, Mr. Cheek. It is a time for making money, not of throwing it away. I wish you had some of the monokeratic principle in you.’

The young man started from the counter, and coloured to the roots of his hair. ‘What do you know of that?’ he asked sharply. ‘I hate the sound, and now it issues from your lips.’

‘Why should you hate it? It has been the means of making a fortune.’

‘It is a trouble to me. I suppose the officers I associate with know about my father, or I suspect they do, and every allusion to a unicorn cuts into me as if the beast itself were driving its horn between my ribs. There it is, plastered on every hoarding, with the inscription “Try Cheek’s Monokeratic System.”’

‘I am sorry to have offended you. I do

not see why you should dislike to hear of that which has made you.'

'Wait, Joanna, till you are near the top of the tree, and then the words Golden Balls will drive you frantic.'

'Maybe,' said Joanna, 'though I do not see why it should. But to return to what I was speaking about before you interrupted me. To my thinking you are leading an altogether unworthy life. Life is a time for making money.'

'Only for those born without it,' said the young man. 'My father has amassed a large fortune. It will be mine some day, no doubt. It is hard that I should be limited to a beggarly four hundred per annum. You would not have me make more money. That would indeed be carrying coals to Newcastle.'

'No, but life has other objects for which a man may strive. There is position. Push for that. Your father is not a gentleman, but you can be one.'

'Well, I am working in that direction,' said Charles. 'I associate with officers, play billiards and cards, and ride and smoke and eat with them.'

'And lose money to them on snails.'

‘Yes, all conduces to good fellowship. I am friends with those who would not meet my father. I have stepped from the counter to one of the shelves.’

‘I am glad your life is not aimless,’ said the girl. ‘If you are striving for position I can respect you; an aimless life is to me despicable.’

‘I cannot say that I have ever thought much about a purpose,’ said Charles Cheek, ‘still—I like to be with those who are my social superiors.’

‘And sometimes to have a chat with such as me—your social inferior.’

‘No doubt about that, Joe.’

‘Well, Mr. Cheek, form a purpose and drive hard after it.’

‘Joe!’ The young man reseated himself on the counter, in a graver, more meditative mood than was common with him. ‘Joe, I should like to have a photograph taken of you. Have you been photographed at any time?’

She shook her head and laughed.

‘You are a girl to make a fellow think and try to do better. I should like to have your picture.’

‘I have had neither the time nor the money to waste on one,’ she answered.

‘The money is nothing. Will you shut up shop for half an hour and come with me to the photographer? I will pay the damage.’

‘I can close. It is now noon, and no business will be done at dinner-time. But I will consent on one condition only.’

‘Any condition you like to make.’

‘Let us three be taken in a group.’

‘What three? You, Lazarus, and I?’

‘No, certainly not. You, I, and the snail.’

‘By all means. Immortalise my folly. I also will make a stipulation: will you grant it?’

‘What is it? I am not like you. I do not offer blank cheques.’

‘Let us be taken holding hands. Just now, when I promised to amend, you flashed out with such a smile, and took my hand and said, “That is right!” It sent a rush of blood to my heart, and I felt as if I had conquered the world. Let us be taken together, holding hands over the snail, and then I shall be nerved to keep my resolution. If disposed to break it, I shall look on the picture and blush.’

‘I consent. Promise me,’ said Joanna, looking down and speaking slowly, ‘that you will not be angry with me whatever you may hear to-morrow. If you are in trouble yourself, do not doubt but that I also shall have to go through humiliation before I can get the money.’

‘From whom will you get it?’

‘Never mind.’

‘But I do mind. You won’t do anything wrong, Joe, even for me?’

‘For the snail, you mean.’

‘I should never forgive myself if you got into trouble. I *do* respect you. There is not another girl in the world I think of or care for as you.’

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.

ILLUSTRATED EDITION OF THE LIFE AND WORKS OF CHARLOTTE BRONTË

(CURRER BELL), AND HER SISTERS

EMILY and ANNE BRONTË

(ELLIS AND ACTON BELL).

In Seven Volumes, large crown 8vo. handsomely bound in cloth, price 5s. per volume.

The descriptions in 'Jane Eyre' and the other fictions by Charlotte Brontë and her Sisters being mostly of actual places, the Publishers considered that Views are the most suitable Illustrations for the novels. They are indebted for a clue to the real names of the most interesting scenes to a friend of the Brontë family, who enabled the artist, Mr. G. M. Wimperis, to identify the places described. He made faithful sketches of them on the spot, and drew them on wood. It is hoped that these views will add fresh interest to the reading of the stories.

JANE EYRE. By CHARLOTTE BRONTË. With Five Illustrations.

SHIRLEY. By CHARLOTTE BRONTË. With Five Illustrations.

VILLETTE. By CHARLOTTE BRONTË. With Five Illustrations.

THE PROFESSOR, and POEMS. By CHARLOTTE BRONTË. With Poems by her Sisters and Father. With Five Illustrations.

WUTHERING HEIGHTS. By EMILY BRONTË. And AGNES GREY. By ANNE BRONTË. With a Preface and Biographical Notice of both Authors by CHARLOTTE BRONTË. With Five Illustrations.

THE TENANT OF WILDFELL HALL. By ANNE BRONTË. With Five Illustrations.

LIFE OF CHARLOTTE BRONTË. By Mrs. GASKELL. With Seven Illustrations.

. *The volumes are also to be had in fcp. 8vo. limp cloth, price 2s. 6d. each.*

UNIFORM EDITION OF

MRS. GASKELL'S NOVELS AND TALES.

In Seven Volumes, each containing Four Illustrations.

Price 3s. 6d. each, bound in cloth; or in Sets of Seven Volumes, handsomely bound in half-morocco, price £2. 10s.

CONTENTS OF THE VOLUMES:

VOL. I. WIVES AND DAUGHTERS.

VOL. II. NORTH AND SOUTH.

VOL. III. SYLVIA'S LOVERS.

VOL. IV. CRANFORD.

Company Manners—The Well of Pen-Morpha—The Heart of John Middleton—Traits and Stories of the Huguenots—Six Weeks at Heppenheim—The Squire's Story—Libbie Marsh's Three Eras—Curious if True—The Moorland Cottage—The Sexton's Hero—Disappearances—Right at last—The Manchester Marriage—Lois the Witch—The Crooked Branch.

VOL. V. MARY BARTON.

Cousin Phillis—My French Master—The Old Nurse's Story—Bessy's Troubles at Home—Christmas Storms and Sunshine.

VOL. VI. RUTH.

The Grey Woman—Morton Hall—Mr. Harrison's Confessions—Hand and Heart.

VOL. VII. LIZZIE LEIGH.

A Dark Night's Work—Round the Sofa—My Lady Ludlow—An Accursed Race—The Doom of the Griffiths—Half a Lifetime Ago—The Poor Clare—The Half-Brothers.

. *The Volumes are also to be had in fcp. 8vo. limp cloth, price 2s. 6d. each.*

London: SMITH, ELDER, & CO., 15 Waterloo Place.

POPULAR NOVELS.

Each Work complete in One Volume, price Six Shillings.

THE GIANT'S ROBE. By F. ANSTEY, Author of
'Vice Versâ' &c. Crown 8vo. 6s.

OLD KENSINGTON. By Miss THACKERAY. Crown
8vo. 6s.

THE VILLAGE ON THE CLIFF. By Miss
THACKERAY. Crown 8vo. 6s.

FIVE OLD FRIENDS AND A YOUNG
PRINCE. By Miss THACKERAY. Crown 8vo. 6s.

TO ESTHER, and other Sketches. By Miss
THACKERAY. Crown 8vo. 6s.

BLUE BEARD'S KEYS, and other Stories.
By Miss THACKERAY. Crown 8vo. 6s.

THE STORY OF ELIZABETH; TWO HOURS;
FROM AN ISLAND. By Miss THACKERAY. Crown 8vo. 6s.

TOILERS AND SPINSTERS, and other Essays.
By Miss THACKERAY. Crown 8vo. 6s.

MISS ANGEL; FULHAM LAWN. By Miss
THACKERAY. Crown 8vo. 6s.

MISS WILLIAMSON'S DIVAGATIONS. By
Miss THACKERAY. Crown 8vo. 6s.

LLANALY REEFS. By Lady VERNEY, Author of
'Stone Edge' &c. Crown 8vo. 6s.

LETTICE LISLE. By Lady VERNEY. With 3 Illustrations.
Crown 8vo. 6s.

London : SMITH, ELDER, & CO., 15 Waterloo Place.

